

THE PALACE AT 3 A.M.  
(ORDO INVERSUS)  
A WOODCUT (RE-)INVENTION  
IN RESONANCE WITH  
MERLEAU-PONTY'S 'CHIASMA'

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THE PALACE AT 3 A.M. (ORDO INVERSUS)  
A WOODCUT (RE-)INVENTION  
IN RESONANCE WITH MERLEAU-PONTY'S  
'CHIASMA'

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## Abstract

This PhD is project and theory based.

The project component of my PhD, *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)*, consists of an exhibition, i.e. a site-specific installation in the Cloister of the Alpirsbach Monastery (Black Forest, Germany).

The written thesis, *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus). A Woodcut (Re-) Invention in Resonance with Merleau-Ponty's 'Chiasma'* investigates the hypothesis that my woodcut method represents a historical rediscovery of this time-honored medium as well as a new radicalization within contemporary printmaking. The investigation places a particular emphasis on self-referential conceptualization and (simultaneously) the programmatic use of the *Chiasma* image, which the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty reintroduced into contemporary discourse. My own artistic approach and method is, moreover, characterized by a distinctly sculptural understanding of the printmaking medium, which is the impetus for the printing block – with its outward sculptural affinity – to take on a coequal and integral role in a confrontational constellation with the print. This sculptural quality, which often tends towards expansive installations, leads to a conscious and offensive treatment of space and spaces manifested in site-specific installations.

In addition, this thesis places a particular emphasis on the relationship between print and printing block, which are examined through the lens of Unity and Difference, the Loss of Unity, the Phenomenon of Mirroring, In-Betweenness, Invisibilities and Chiasma – all aspects which culminate in the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)*.

In art history and its scholarly literature – there are no comparable examples in which the connection and interplay between print and printing block arises so inevitably and *naturally*, in a truly intrusive manner and celebrated on a formal level. This relation is not just a subservient or aesthetically free

interaction, but rather – *nolens volens* – a conditional relationship creating an integral-genealogical entanglement with one another. From the trunk section of a tree very thin leaves of wood are peeled off radially. While the wooden cylinder serves as printing block the wooden leaves become the prints.

Although the relationship between print and printing block is absolutely fundamental to the woodcut medium, there is hardly any relevant literature on the subject, much less a full-fledged study or monograph. In this respect, the present thesis can also be seen as a long overdue contribution to this aesthetic and philosophical discourse. If nothing else, this PhD project should show that it is possible to breathe new life into a tradition, which is even sometimes considered passé these days, and to even make a significant contribution to a potential renaissance of the medium.



## Preface

It can be demonstrated in numerous biographies that life-changing images and motivic structures tend to form at a very early stage. In my own biography this grew out of an intensive reading of philosophy between the ages of 16 and 18. The confrontation with basic philosophical questions – which at least for this age group is not really ordinary – was brought on by the early death of my father – from the long-term effects of a war injury – when I was 15. This tragic loss with decisive consequences brought first and foremost existential questions of identity to the fore, without which this time would have been difficult to work through, i.e. there was a diffuse seeking drive, which could only be more precisely characterized years or decades later.

The first work that I read in that time was *The Principle of Hope* by the German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) – one might say that the title is quite telling. However, it was not so much the term hope, which is foregrounded in the title, that was the attraction and point of departure for the exploration of the Blochian ideas, but rather the myriad of interlocking connotations of the term *homeland* (German: *Heimat*):

... man everywhere is still living in prehistory, indeed all and everything still stands before the creation of the world, of a right world. True genesis is not at the beginning but at the end, and it starts to begin only when society and existence become radical, i.e., grasps their roots. But the root of history is the working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts. Once he has grasped himself and re-established what is his, without expropriation and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: a homeland. (Bloch, 1986, p. 1375)

Without wanting to give away the content just yet, we can make the conjecture that perhaps only someone with a deep longing for 'homeland' and identity would be able to invent – and also quasi-decompose – a woodcut method, which is so deeply – by definition – beset with a the

motives of origin, memories, identity and finally homeland itself. Thus this doctoral thesis is dedicated my father – who himself went down this same path.

Coming from the Blochian concept of 'homeland' it was not that far to Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) and his concept identity, in which this comes together most clearly in the triad of differentiation between identity (being identical) and difference, which then leads to identity (which is for the most part spontaneous).

The last major influence from this time can be traced back to Plato (428-348 BC) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and their profound – but divergent – differentiation between *phenomena* and *noumena*. The *phenomenon* is experienceable with the senses, while the *noumenon* is the idea as a purely intellectual entity. In Plato the latter is seen as the actual reality, whereas in Kant it is a difficult or even inaccessible limit-concept. The relationship of *phenomena* and *noumena* – more in a Platonic sense – has been to a certain extent the only thing that has really interested me.

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# 1. Clara et Confusa Perceptio (& Cognitio)

'The poverty of philosophy remains a failure to act. And yet a philosophy of action seems the only hope remaining in the face of our present conditions of existence. Such a philosophy will materialize, I believe, when the philosopher has learned to engage body, mind, and spirit in the concrete representation of a philosophical abstraction. Who will this philosopher be, if not the artist-philosopher?'

George Smith,  
Founding President, Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts, Portland USA<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1. Introduction

The history of printmaking techniques in general and the artistic medium of the woodcut in particular have been the subject of numerous scholarly accounts to the extent that many see it as a field where there is little new to say – art schools are eliminating professorships in this area or setting their focus on other areas, galleries are becoming less and less interested in such works etc. and so forth. Even museums in many places prefer to focus on photography. By contrast the present thesis should make clear that under certain conditions it is indeed possible to breathe new life into this long tradition and even to make a significant contribution to a potential renaissance in the field.

The introduction to this PhD thesis will first establish the context for my work on a fundamental level, describe my motivation for undertaking a PhD project – this raises the question how doctoral studies can be meaningfully integrated into an artistic context – and finally ending with a brief overview of the chapters in the thesis, including a discussion of the methodology.

In general my oeuvre consists of works from the areas of sculpture, printmaking, drawing, photography, and theoretical and philosophical studies. Nevertheless, a sculptural-visual approach – as distinguished from a graphic approach – was, for a long time, predominant, particularly during the first

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<sup>1</sup> Smith [Online]. Available at: <http://idsva.org/about-idsva/message-from-the-president/> (Accessed: 5 June 2014).

years of my own studies. During this period I made a fundamental decision to focus solely, or concentrate, on materiality, more specifically on the tree as a system of comprehending meaning since it is per se a means of implying the symbolic nature of the fragility of natural processes or states of existence. As a preliminary consideration, it must also be ascertained if the development of the works was informed, from the very beginning, by a contemplation of various formative processes. Following this orientation these processes were – always based on ensuing time-bound corporeality, spatial presence and a relation to the location handled accordingly and reacting to it – in a permanent state of interaction with the underlying ideas. These interactions often led to what can be called *mental-pictures* (ideograms), pictures that – in an almost *erotic* manner – are evoked by words, terms and texts.

Over the years a profound body of creative work of wide ramifications has taken shape. Two cycles of works in particular have long been overdue for a study that would examine the image and thought structures inherent to the works on a philosophical level – to explicate them to some extent. This particularly true for the *Chiasma (II)* cycle that was first shown in 2005, but also for the *Nanna-Paradox* cycle shown a year later, which although related to the *Chiasma (II)* cycle in terms of content is of a completely other nature formally.

At first glance both of these cycles seem to suggest a conceptual approach, which is on a fundamental level not false, but this falls short when seen from a broader perspective – this does not take into consideration a special openness of the working process. There was and still is no firm overarching and invariable concept for the *Chiasma (II)* cycle. On the contrary a chiastic motive – a symbol of its own content – means a continually oscillating gesture of progression, questioning and reorientation. The essence of my own method can be subsumed more potently and accurately in the image of the noun *chiasma: ideae rerum*. This is particularly applicable to this doctoral project: the conceptual argument can be seen as an inherent motive in the sense of a *chiasma* as an integral part of the underlying artistic work.

Moreover, there is – or at least that is the claim – no structural-pneumatic<sup>2</sup> difference between a graphic-artistic and a reflective-mental underpinning of meaning.

## 1.2. Concept and Research Questions of the PhD Project

This PhD is project and theory based.

The project component of my PhD, *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* / *Der Palast um 3 Uhr morgens (Ordo Inversus)*, consists of an exhibition, i.e. a site-specific installation in the cloister of the Alpirsbach Monastery (Black Forest, Germany). This project has involved several years of preparation and must therefore be seen as a very elaborate undertaking, but also as a work that occupies a prominent position in my oeuvre. To the extent that a wide range of lines of investigation and diverse aspects of my work culminate in this piece, it has almost autonomously taken on the significance of an *opus summum*. This site-specific installation (designated as *Site-Work VII* in my catalogue of works) is a graphic work, and thus is based on my own woodcut method, as well as sculpture. It creates a silence space along with a negative space reflecting *unity and difference, identity and in-betweenness, mirroring and invisibility*.

The theoretical component, *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus). A Woodcut (Re-)Invention in Resonance with Merleau-Ponty's 'Chiasma'*, investigates the thesis that my own process of the woodcut represents a

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<sup>2</sup> This term surely needs to be explained. Its use here has been carefully calculated and motivated – perhaps even justified. In contemporary discourse, *pneuma* (Greek: spirit, fiery breath) is hardly ever used anymore. There are however compelling reasons to reintroduce the term: *pneuma* can – especially due to its efficacious historicity – be used as an alternative term for something spiritual, especially as it displays certain similarity with Asian concepts (chi, prana, akasha). Last but not least this term has a linguistic beauty all of its own. The German author Botho Strauß (1999, p. 42) writes about a 'sacred poetic' in his essay "Der Aufstand gegen die sekundäre Welt" (1991): 'The word tree is the tree, for each word is intrinsically the word of God, and consequently there can be no pneumatic difference between the creator of the word and the creator of the thing' (own translation).



(re-)invention of this time-honored medium as a modern radicalization within contemporary printmaking (Preising, 2005b, p. 26), with a particular emphasis on the self-referential conceptualization and programmatic use of the image of *chiasma*, which the French philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) modernized and introduced into contemporary philosophical discourse. In art history and its scholarly literature – there are no comparable examples in which the connection and interplay between print and printing block arises so inevitably and ‘naturally’, in a truly intrusive manner and celebrated on a formal level. This relation is not just a subservient or aesthetically free interaction, but rather – *nolens volens* – a conditional relationship creating an integral-genealogical entanglement with one another. As a redoubled unique – having its origin in a single tree trunk – the printing process gives rise to an implicit paradox of contact with the origin along with a simultaneous loss of the origin in a uniquely compelling way.

In this sense, the **primary research questions** of this PhD are: What is the basis for the unique nature and innovation present in my woodcut technique? How can this be described and expanded upon ontologically and topographically<sup>3</sup> in each of the developmental steps of the endeavour?

The research questions in particular focus on the following thematic areas:

- 1) Unity & Difference
- 2) The Loss of Unity
- 3) The Phenomenon of Mirroring
- 4) In-Betweenness
- 5) The Phenomenon of the Invisibility
- 6) Chiasma
- 7) Project Part

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<sup>3</sup> During a three year professorship (2004-2007) at the Offenbach University of Art and Design, I founded on my own initiative the *Institute for Experimental TopoGraphy*. Information about the term *TopoGraphy* which serves as a basis for my own work and that of the institute can be found at <http://www.christophloos.com/a013.html>.

These seven questions can be summarized into the following four research goals:

- A. The first and most basic concern in this study is to substantiate the claim that my method represents a (re-)invention of the graphic art medium of the woodcut.
- B. A second goal involves working out to what extent the uniqueness of my woodcut method is characterized by the concept of unity that is a fundamental part of the process
- C. The third task is to show to what extent the concept of *chiasma* proves to be appropriate for understanding my work.
- D. The fourth task is to investigate the question to what extent more than 20 years of development of my works can be seen to essentially culminate in the project realized in the context of this PhD project.

### **1.3. Dissertations in an Artistic Context**

In addition to an explicit wish to undertake a PhD project, there was also just as much doubt, especially as the plan became more concrete and the daunting dimensions of such an endeavor became clear: Why should I attempt to theorize my own images and artistic principles? What would this research contribute to my own art, my understanding of art and to art in general? How should the results achieved be understood? To address this questionable disposition, we will begin with a few brief remarks that try to address the specifics of a PhD in the field of art in general. On a fundamental level, it is true to say that the ‘arts just like the sciences... engage in a process of research with their ‘epistemic objects’ (own translation) (Dombois, 2006, p. 23). In this sense, the German artist Florian Dombois (\*1966) speaks of ‘art as research’:

...an understanding only becomes an element of research if it is communicable. Therefore in addition to continual involvement in the research, a constant point by point best possible formulation is needed. This moment of performance can be seen as a moment that produces an understanding. (own translation) (Dombois, 2006, p.23)

Dombois refers to the German philosopher Georg Picht (1913-1982), who is of the opinion that understanding can only begin to develop through performance:

Performance is a form of understanding of the truth that is not reducible to any other form of our understanding; it uncovers connections in reality that no theory or practice could expose, and which are completely foreign to our everyday experience. (own translation) (Picht, 1990, p.141)

Dombois (2006, p. 23) thus refers back to the '(overwhelmingly) non-linguistic nature of the arts' and claims 'that 'art as research' should find its expression in every sort of performance, which belong to them' (own translation). It is not academic articles but rather artistic means of performance – such as images, compositions or films – that function as the 'research results and carriers of knowledge':

This opening of media promises an expansion of that which can be perceived; in addition to that which can be expressed linguistically, other forms of performance and the medium itself become carriers of meaning. (own translation) (Dombois, 2006, p. 23)

According to Dombois (2006, p. 23-24), the 'open system of understanding in Western sciences' takes on a new dimension, which can however only be developed if 'the artistic research is not just merely a translation or repetition of (scientific) results in image, sound or text' (own translation). For:

That would be illustration. It has to be much more focused on a genuine formulation of something that is not able to be adequately grasped in other disciplines. Only when this has been achieved does "art as research" have a right to stand next to scientific research. (own translation) (Dombois, 2006, p. 24)

At this point it should be mentioned that the essay "Research in Art and Design" by the British historian Christopher Frayling (\*1946) from the year 1993 was pivotal for the general development of PhD projects in the area of art. Frayling (1993, p. 5) differentiates between 'research *into* art and design', 'research *through* art and design' and 'research *for* art and design'. The most traditional of these forms is 'research *into* art and design', in which art is for

example the object of an art historical study. 'Research *through* art and design' on the other hand 'accounts for research where art or design is the vehicle of the research, and a means of communicating the results' (Newbury, 1996, p. 216). The trickiest type of research in this triad is according to Frayling 'research *for* art and design':

Research where the end product is an artefact – where the thinking is, so to speak, *embodied in the artefact*, where the goal is not primarily communicable knowledge in the sense of visual or iconic or imagistic communication. (Frayling, 1993, p. 5)<sup>4</sup>

The English artist and professor Darren Newbury worked out the advantages of combining practical and theoretical research, which he demonstrates with the following example:

The best of art and design research seems to facilitate an interaction between the different research traditions, practical and academic. ...both traditions have much to gain (Newbury, 1996, p. 217).

He concludes:

The current position of art and design within higher education, and the scope that exists for the development of art and design research offers an opportunity to foster an interesting range of connections between different disciplines, forms of knowledge and research traditions. The institutionalization of the division between reflection and action, theory and practice, has always been of dubious worth, and should be rejected in

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<sup>4</sup> Drawing on Christopher Frayling, the German art historian and art theorist Kathrin Busch also divides artistic research into three forms. In her essay "Künstlerische Forschung – Potentialität des Unbedingten" / "Artistic Research – Potentiality of the Implicit" (own translation) Busch distinguishes between 'Kunst *mit* Forschung', 'Kunst *über* Forschung' and 'Kunst *als* Forschung' ('art *with* research', 'art *about* research' and 'art *as* research') (Busch, 2008, p. 92-93). In discussing 'art *as* research' Anna Wiese (2013, p. 22) refers to Busch: 'works in which scientific processes are transformed into an instrument for art.... Here art becomes a form of knowledge. It is not limited to already existing finding, but can itself become the site of knowledge generation. ... Art and science would unravel around the edges here, as the scientific argumentation and the artistic criteria interweave. Artistic work thus takes on the task of producing knowledge from a critical point of view. It would be valid to research the social context using the medium of art' (own translation). According to Wiese (2013, p. 23), Busch places the 'focus... on the stubborn quality of the artistic modes of knowledge.... They reveal the inherent boundaries in the sciences by taking up that which is excluded from science. They point out that which can not be represented and thus encroach on the theoretical discourse in order to participate in the contemporary quest for knowledge' (own translation).

favour of a more interactive and interdisciplinary approach, which will be to the benefit of all. (Newbury, 1996, p. 219)

Surprisingly such intellectual contexts and considerations can already be found in the ground-breaking work *Aesthetica* by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) written in the years 1750/58. Baumgarten's work can be considered to be the first philosophical treatment of Aesthetics in the history of philosophy, in which the idea of aesthetic or artistic knowledge was propagated. The German philosopher and professor Constanze Peres (no date, p. 8) references Baumgarten's discussions of the 'double function of the sensory experience', which Baumgarten developed based on the German philosophers Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) and Christian Wolff (1679-1754). According to Leibniz a distinction must be drawn between *perceptio clara* and *perceptio obscura*. The *perceptio clara* is itself divided into a *perceptio distincta* and a *perceptio confusa*. A sensual or aesthetic and artistic understanding is therefore a combination of the *perceptio clara* and its subset *perceptio confusa* (Peres, not date, p. 5). Baumgarten's contribution can be understood as an attempt to overcome Descartes' cogito, if this explicitly recognizes a contribution of art to the creation of knowledge. Baumgarten's *clara et confusa perceptio* is not only bridges the gap to Frayling's understanding of art as a form or as a medium of knowledge. Moreover Baumgarten's aesthetic can also be connected with the holistic philosophical work of Merleau-Ponty<sup>5</sup>, whose post-Cartesian philosophy has an intrinsic resonance and connection to the present work. This will be dealt with in detail later on in Chapter 6, 7 and 8.

In the end there were three decisive reasons for the decision to undertake a PhD project. First there was the desire or perhaps even the need – almost as a duty to the logic of my own works – to establish a theoretical and conceptual side of the work that could stand *on an equal footing* with the creative side of the work that already exists and to be able to examine this in the context of an investigation of the aspiration towards the (re-)invention of

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<sup>5</sup> This is related to Merleau-Ponty's term *D'être sauvage*, cf. chapter 8.7.

the woodcut. How could this be done more sustainably, and in the case of a successful argument, more convincing, than by composing a dissertation (lat. dissertation: extensive consideration)? Second there was the wish to clarify and investigate the influence, impulse and interaction that the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty has on the development of my works. And finally the desire to actually realize a work that has been in planning for a considerable amount of time and which aspires to embody or carry around 20 years of the development of my works as a sort of *opus summum* and over the course of this realization to explicate the corresponding theoretical basis – which is also valid for my entire body of previous works.

In an attempt to forestall potential criticism and to make the limitations of this PhD project unambiguously clear from the start: it is my own conviction that it is unacceptable for an artist to engage in the interpretation of his/her own work in order to *inflate* its value. The point is rather to above all ensure that the potential that is contained in the work and connected to it – *nolens volens* – is allowed to shine through and to give voice to the implicit categories and dimension. In general it also has to be noted that the meaning-levels of all the woodcuts run in parallel and that they are intertwined with one another. Any attempt to untangle what the individual contribution of each work, the woodcuts and woodcut installations is to the PhD project is ultimately just a provisory attempt and in any case an incommensurable residue remains.

#### **1.4. Chapter Overview with Notes on Methodology**

The present PhD thesis consists of ten chapters. While first two chapters are dedicated to the introduction of the PhD project and my artistic oeuvre, chapters 3-8 form the central theoretical analysis, which deals with the most important aspects of my woodcut method. The investigations and analyses undertaken in these chapters then form the basis for chapter 9, which contains the detailed description, documentation and critical reflection on the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* in the cloister of the Alpirsbach Monastery that has been realized for this PhD project.

The following basic methodological instruments occur throughout the thesis and are employed in all chapters:

**Discursive analysis:** Conducting a survey of the literature on each of the thematic areas, selecting, analysing and placing the information collected in to a conceptual framework.

**Autoethnography:** Phenomenological observation and examination of individual pieces in the context of larger works or my body of work as they relate to the research questions investigated in this PhD project.

In addition certain methods are only used in single chapters:

**Expert conversation** with woodcut artist Marian Crawford (chapter 4).

**Empirical experimentation** in the form of an installation undertaken for this PhD project (chapter 9).

#### Chapter 1:

The first chapter – in which the reader finds himself/herself – provides an introduction to the goals and aims of this PhD by Practice. The first sections present the present submission and the empirical part. This is followed by the general research question, which is examined in the seven meta-themes, and a description of the four goals of the research. Next there is a discussion about the meaning and purpose of dissertations in an artistic context, which seems to be necessary to provide a rationale and PhD-immanent justification for the project. The chapter finishes with an overview of alls chapters and an explanation of the methodology used.

#### Chapter 2:

The second chapter (“A (Re-)Invention of the Woodcut”) presents a wide-ranging introduction into the subject of the woodcut with a particular emphasis on the relationship of print and printing block. A compact, systematic and comparative sketch of the history of the woodcut forms the basis for the presentation my own woodcut method and the explanation of the terminology connected with it. This will not only present the *idiosyncrasies* or the distinctive features of my printmaking process, but also postulate and support the thesis that my method represents a (re-)invention of the woodcut, which has to be above all else clearly differentiated from the

conventional paper-based printmaking. This thesis will be further substantiated by looking at a range of selected art historical and critical positions concerning my own work.

#### Chapter 3:

The third chapter (“Unity, Division, Difference – Unity, ...”) is the first of five chapters (chapters 3-8) that are dedicated to core aspects underpinning the relationship of print and printing block in my own oeuvre. On the basis of examples from my own work – combined with relevant examples from contemporary art – the integral-genealogical concept of unity that is one of distinguishing features of my woodcut method will be explained, and the concepts of *difference* and *identity* will be investigated in the context of my works and will be discussed and supported by the basic theoretical and philosophical principles. Finally using the concept of *mimesis*, the chapter closes with a *search for the unity* – in the sense of *imitatio* – of print and printing block.

#### Chapter 4:

Chapter 4 (“À la recherche du temps perdue”) picks up directly on the themes handled in the previous chapter but differs significantly in its structure and pace from the other chapters in this thesis. The topic centers around the essay “The Print and Impossible Mourning” by the Australian artist Marian Crawford and the resulting discussion conducted with Crawford on the further implications in interaction with my own work.

#### Chapter 5:

Under the title “Ordo Inversus” the fifth chapter is dedicated to the phenomenon of mirroring in printmaking in general as well as in the various phases of the working process in my own work in particular. Based on a brief overview of the history of the mirror and an outline of the art historical and philosophical discussion of different definitions of the terms *mirroring* and *image*, the individual working phases involving mirroring will be explained and – if applicable – placed into context with the help of relevant examples for contemporary art.



#### Chapter 6:

Chapter 6 (“In-Betweenness”) summarizes the main positions in the humanities concerning the themes of *in-betweenness* or *intermediate spaces*. In doing so the question whether there can be said to be an authentic category of *something that is lying in between* in my work will be addressed. After one of the first approaches to this difficult and intangible term through related adjacent terms (such as *hiatus* and *méthexis*), *in-betweenness* will be explained and elucidated with examples from visual culture, art history and several examples from my works. The chapter closes with a section on “Prospects” in which, for the first time in the course of this work, reference is made to the philosophy of the French phenomenological theorist Merleau-Ponty.

#### Chapter 7:

The following chapter takes up the phenomenon of “Invisibilities”, which manifest themselves in three different contexts in my work. Based on relevant examples from my work, the invisibility in the reception of my works as well as two different conceptual context involving invisibility will be examined. The overall context will be explained using philosophical deliberations as well as comparisons with selected examples from art. This will be done from the viewpoint that a radical concept of the image in my work – up to and including the complete elimination of any sort of *depiction* – can lead to a new basis for understanding printmaking in which the sculptural or space filling aspect is foregrounded.

#### Chapter 8:

Chapter 8 looks into the theorem of chiasm, which is foundational for the provided thesis as well as for the artistic oeuvre. Following a short explanation of basic terms and a brief presentation of the conceptualization in my own oeuvre since 2003 with an exemplarily work of art, light is shed on the notion of *chiasma*. This is done firstly philosophy historically and then in its particularity in relation to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. On this base, the influence and interplay of the theorem of *chiasm* in my own oeuvre are discussed and the corresponding experience of the work of art as

*negative metaphysic* interpreted. This reading finds also its correspondence in the writings of Merleau-Ponty.

#### Chapter 9:

The ninth chapter entails explications and a documentation of the empirical part of the project for this PhD which is the locally specific installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* in the cloister of the Alpirsbach Monastery (Black Forest, Germany). Subsequent to the presentation of the conceptualization of the project the installation will be documented in detail with photos in form of a portfolio. Finally, the status of this installation *opus summum* in my own oeuvre will be thermalized.

#### Chapter 10:

In the last chapter of the provided PhD the basic considerations and findings of all previous elaborations are summarized and stated in a listing of ten issues as contribution to knowledge. By way of a prospect continuative implications for a manifest about *absolute wood-cuts* are discussed that are offering potentials for the impetus or initiation of a subsequent discourse.

#### Postscript – concerning the state of available literature:

Finally it should be noted here that the existing literature in particular that dealing with the core themes investigated in this project concerning the relationship between print and printing block is indeed quite scant, which indicates that this question has been seldom pursued, thematized and published on. Although the inclusion and analysis of the printing block is from my point of view fertile ground for investigation that is urgently need, this has not been sufficiently considered in the historical and contemporary art history literature.

## 2. A (Re-)Invention of Woodcut

‘...a concept of the imprint, which intrinsically evolves into a non-concept: *You never know what comes of it*. The *shape* is, in the process of imprinting, never truly “fore-seeable”: it is always problematic, unexpected, unsteady, *open*.’

(Georges Didi-Huberman)<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1. Introduction

As the object of investigation or goal of this thesis revolves around the implications of the (re-)invention of the woodcut medium, this second chapter will now present a brief overview of the historical development of the woodcut with a view to the relationship between print and printing block. In addition, my own woodcut method will be introduced and described, bearing in mind the processes that led to this (re-)invention. This will show how my own method represents a break with conventional or paper-based printmaking. Finally, I will attempt to place my work in context of contemporary printmaking by analyzing relevant examples of reception.

### 2.2. A Brief History of the Woodcut

The relationship between print and printing block – over the course of the history of the woodcut – is characterized by numerous transformations. In its basis form, the woodcut can already be found very early in the development of a wide range of cultures and civilizations. In antiquity woodcuts were for example used to decorate textiles (Stoschek, 2000, p. 9). According to the German art historian Paul Kristeller (1863-1931), the Babylonians and the Romans already used decorative molds for bricks used in public buildings (Kristeller, 2012, p. 16). In ancient China – even before the invention of paper in the first century AD – there is already evidence of stamps and seals, which can be seen as the precursors of the woodcut (Lenhart, 1939, p. 288).

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<sup>6</sup> Didi-Huberman, 1999, p. 18 (own translation).

In Central Europe the first so-called single-leaf woodcuts or popular prints began to appear around 1400: devotional images of saints, which were manufactured for domestic use for private devotion. Text and images were cut in wood, ink was applied and then pressed on paper. The simple and low cost reproduction of these images made it possible for a wide cross section of society to have access to such prints – even when they exhibit little artistic quality and were first and foremost seen as utilitarian religious items, as ‘private sacred images’ (own translation) (Belting, 1993, pp. 474-475). Often only the outline of the desired image was carved into the printing block, lending the print its own individual aesthetic (Fig 1). In the form of the so-called block book or xylographica, in which images and text were both cut into a wooden block and pressed by hand using rubbing pressure<sup>7</sup>, woodcuts found their way into book illustration early on<sup>8</sup> (Stoschek, 2000, p. 12-13).<sup>9</sup>



Fig 1: Unknown (Bavaria): The Holy Dorothy (circa 1410/25).

<sup>7</sup> This was typically accomplished using a leather ball stuffed with horse hair (Stoschek, 2000, p. 14)

<sup>8</sup> Block books – woodcuts bound together as books – were mainly printed in what is today Germany and the Netherlands. Many distinct methods were employed: while the chiroxylographic block books for example only contained images and the text was written by hand, in the later xylographic block books, text and images were both carved in to the printing block (Blattner, 2000, p. 38).

<sup>9</sup> The woodcut was the dominant method used for printing books until Johannes Gutenberg laid the foundation for modern book printing with the invention of moveable type around 1450.

The German artist Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) expanded the horizons of the woodcut opening the door to 'an as yet unknown blossoming of artistic and technical developments' (own translation) (Stoschek, 2000, p. 17), by fashioning motives that were much more varied and delicate than his predecessors (Fig 2). By using devices such as crosshatching, the introduction of contrasts between light and dark and the use of perspective, Dürer became the pioneer of the 'autonomous woodcut' and revolutionized its technique in general (Stoschek, 2000, p. 18). Because of the extensive plagiarism of his work, Dürer lobbied for legal protection, which led to the introduction of a copyright law (Stoschek, 2000, pp. 19-21).



Fig 2: Albrecht Dürer: Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (1498).

After this high period, the woodcut as medium of artistic expression receded into the background at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century – giving way to techniques such as etching and copperplate engraving, which allowed for even more finely differentiated results (Schlenker, 200, p. 16). In 19<sup>th</sup> century England, the technique of wood engraving developed by Thomas Bewick (1753-1828) flourished. Wood engraving is characterized by the use of the end grain for printing, which makes for sharper contours when carving than is possible in classical woodcuts (Fig 3).



ornamental surfaces. For example crosshatching in Gauguin is no longer used to lend a plastic effect to the image depicted, but also to modulate color (Fig 4). In this way he sought to not only control the graphic design, but also the overall effect of the colored areas and the effect of the image (Gercken, 2000, p. 26). In addition it is well known that Gauguin not only deliberately followed the structure of the wood during the carving process, but that he also intentionally disguised the contours through repeated pressing, which lends a unique quality to each individual print (Sýkorová, 1963, p. 8).

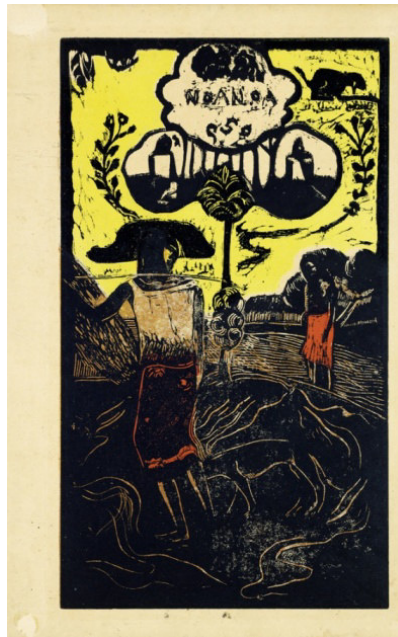


Fig 4: Paul Gauguin: Noa Noa (1897).

The Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944) further refined the technique of the woodcut with a richly varied technique that he invented: instead of printing with different plates in separate steps, he sawed apart the wooden blocks. After applying different colored ink to each section, they are once again reassembled and the printing process can commence (Fig 5). This sawing apart and subsequent coloring and reassembly was accompanied by a simplification of the woodcut process: instead of several printing steps only one was necessary (Gercken, 2000, p. 26).





Fig 5: Edvard Munch: Head to Head (1905).

During WWII it was not only the expressionistic zeitgeist that dissipated, the woodcut was almost completely abandoned in the fine arts (Gercken, 2000, p. 24). One of the few artists whose work – despite being banned from exhibiting and working as an artist under the National Socialist dictatorship – continued in secret was HAP Grieshaber (1909-1981), who has made a decisive contribution to the development of the woodcut in German speaking countries after 1945 (Köser-Rudolph, 2000, p. 50). Grieshaber's woodcuts stand out on the one hand due to their truly monumental size<sup>11</sup> (Fig 6), which has inspired numerous artists – especially since the 1970s. Grieshaber helped to permanently raise the status of the woodcut to that of an autonomous work of art that fills an entire wall and must be viewed from a distance (Köser-Rudolph, 2000, pp. 51-52). A second innovation can be found in the growing importance of the craftsmanship in the work. The large format prints required not only physical strength in their manufacturing process, but also the use of special tools and machinery. For Grieshaber '[the] 'doing', the craftsmanship,... was just as meaningful as the ideas and their effect' (own translation) (Köser-Rudolph, 2000, p. 53). The print was seen as its own artistic process (Köser-Rudolph, 2000, p. 53), where the meeting of print and printing block creates a moment in which chance and control meet.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> By way of example for the documenta 3 (1964) Grieshaber filled a wall of 240 x 120 cm with five prints and five printing blocks (Köser-Rudolph, 2000, p. 51).

<sup>12</sup> HAP Grieshaber himself described this as follows: 'Printing is a meeting of chance with the meaningful. Printing is itself the experience. Printing is the rush of doing and at the same





Fig 6: HAP Grieshaber: Picture of Lacrimose (own translation) (1952).

After the Second World War, there was renewed interest in the woodcut. In the ZERO group of artists<sup>13</sup>, Günther Uecker (\*1930) for example created a series of printing blocks that were studded with nail, which could be seen in the relief they left in the prints – as the ‘concreteness of the nail’ (Stahlhut, 2000, p. 298). Uecker used the woodcut above all as a visualization of injury and destruction:

In an aggressive act, he drives the nails into his object. He needs the certainty of this physical act to become aware of his art. In the same way he treats the wooden block, so too does he scrape the structure into the wood as a form of stigmatization. (own translation) (Städtisches Kunstmuseum Spendhaus Reutlingen [SKSR], 2009, p. 176)

The Swiss artist Franz Gertsch (\*1930) approaches the printing block in a totally different manner. After he initially tested his woodcut technique to make portraits, his work since the 1980s has been dominated by nature scenes (Spieler, 2005, p. 16), which – when viewed from a certain distance – display a photorealistic aesthetic (Fig 7). To achieve this effect, he cuts millions of tiny wood particles often no bigger than the head of a pin out of the

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time the control over tension, command over the expression, a driving force, radicalism...’ (own translation) (Grieshaber, 1978, p. 19).

<sup>13</sup> The German group of artists ZERO was founded in 1958 by Otto Piene and Heinz Mack. In 1961 Günther Uecker joined. The group called for a new beginning for art in the postwar period.

printing block in a laborious process (SKSR, 2009, p. 192). This method required among other things the development of a suitable pigment for the prints.<sup>14</sup> The printing process can stretch over several days. The prints that result from this time intensive process are extraordinary for the enormous attention to detail.<sup>15</sup>



Fig 7: Franz Gertsch: Black Water Triptych (1991/92).

As the approach to materials became freer and the technical processes of the woodcut were refined, the some of the terminology used in German began to change. When discussing the works of contemporary artists such as Gustav Kluge (\*1947) or Felix Droese (\*1950), the term *Holzdruck* (*woodprint*) is used more often. While the term *woodcut* clearly locates the artistic work in the carving of the printing block, the term *woodprint* emphasizes the moment of printing (Gercken, 2000, p. 24).<sup>16</sup> In his wide range of woodcut works, Gustav Kluge uses doors, floor boards or discs cut from tree trunks among other objects, which he uses to print canvases glazed with paint several times in succession. The repetition of the printing process with one or two blocks and partially washing off the paint between each printing step leads to a layering of coats of paint that is closer to the

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<sup>14</sup> Gertsch worked with the collaborated with the chemist Georg Kremer, who was an expert in dyes and paints. The pigments were mixed with a clear oil vanish based paint, which had a completely smooth texture (SKSR, 2009, p. 192).

<sup>15</sup> 'Gertsch's secret is that he was never satisfied with just simply depicting 'reality', but rather opened up a totally new way of looking at reality with his unique conceptual approach' (own translation) (Spieler et al., 2005, p. 7).

<sup>16</sup> According to the German artist Jürgen Partenheimer (\*1947) the essential feature of the print comes from the moment of the twofold creation: 'The works are executed in two stages in cutting and printing as an artist and an artisan. The craftsmanship translates the thinking into acting, letting the work emerge' (own translation) (SKSR, 2009, p. 23).

aesthetics of painting that that of a woodcut, which is founded on soft contours and colors that have a transparent effect rather than being saturated (Gercken, 2000, p. 34-35). Günther Gercken (2000, p. 35) describes Kluge's process as *painting* with the printing block.

An increasing integration of the printing block along with the printed material can be found in the work of Felix Droese. He uses the woodprint for political and moral statements while at the same time incorporating the origin of the medium into the work on a fundamental level. The use of austere, 'worn out' materials – e.g. driftwood or newspaper – contributes to the statement of the print<sup>17</sup> (Fig 8). Concerning this Gercken (2000, p. 35) writes: 'The wooden block is not just a printing tool. It activates the whole semantic field of wood as a grown, used and decaying substance'. As a part of a tree that already comes with its own distinctive features, the wood takes on 'double function: as printing block and as autonomous object, as a 'plastic event' or as part of an installation' (own translation) (SKSR, 2009, p. 23).



Fig 8: Felix Droese: Chroococcus – Multiplication through division (III) (own translation) (2011).

The Berlin artist Thomas Kilpper (\*1956) also emphasizes the sculptural or installation character of the woodcut in his large format works. Kilpper

<sup>17</sup> Droese thematizes humankind's destruction of the environment for example in the work *Holznot* (1989) – a piece of driftwood in which he carved the German word *Holznot* (wood shortage) (Gercken, 2000, p. 35).

appropriates vacant buildings for the presentation of his woodcut works. For example in the course of his exhibition *State of control*, he made use of the cafeteria in one of the buildings formerly occupied by the Stasi in East Berlin (Babias, 2009, pp. 11-14). In a meticulous process he installs woodcuts on the floor of these spaces (as if installing hard wood flooring). He then makes prints of the floors on paper, cloth or PVC transparencies, a part of which are displayed freely throughout the room (Krümmel, 2009, pp. 87-88). In Kilpper's Installations the print becomes a 'revolutionary form with a specific relationship to histories of resistance' (Roca, 2011, p. 34).

A further example of the increasingly common use of the printing block or the printing plates as an integral part of an installation is the work of the piece *If the Tread is an Echo* (2010) by the Israeli artist Orit Hofshi (b. 1959), in which the printing plates are placed in front of the large format prints hung on the wall: 'Hofshi built a small shed of pine-board matrices, which she attached to a large wall installation of prints and their matrices' (Schultz, 2011, p. 17) (Fig 9). For Hofshi's first three-dimensional work, large format pine boards as well as handmade Japanese paper serve as the printing substrate. Hofshi describes the intention behind this mode of presentation as follows: '...to create an experience viewers can physically be part of and [in which they can be] collaborators in the conceptual outcome' (Schultz, 2011, p. 17).



Fig 9: Orit Hofshi: *If the Tread is an Echo* (2010), Woodcut, markers drawing and stone stick tusche rubbing on carved pine wood panels and handmade paper, 136 x 287 cm, installation view Philagrafika 2010.

Similar considerations are also central to Hofshi's work *Convergence* (2011) (Fig 10). In addition to the print and the printing plates, this piece also presents the printing substance – in the form of a bucket of ink – which refers back to the printing process itself. Hofshi has this to say about this:

... (the) synthesis of these elements goes beyond process and matter. Paper is also typically a product of wood. The imagery of cascading stones [printed on the paper] is a visible testimony of the physical carving of the wood. Darkly inked wood panels surrender just glimpses of the imagery, and the dark liquid basins reflect the imagery in turn. (Schultz, 2011, p. 17)

The US art critic Charles Schultz labelled *Convergence* as

...installation about printmaking itself... *Convergence* may refer... not only to the intersection of stages oriented around processes and material, but also to the metaphysical relationship between memory and nowness. It suggests that memory is always a function of the present moment, and that through memory the past is always present. *Convergence* also works as a metaphor for the "printstallation" as a form, at once exceptionally contemporary and thoroughly rooted in both historic processes and the ambition of the 20th century avant-garde to merge art and life. If the print-based installation is an art form of the moment, perhaps it is because this moment is permeated by the growing power of images and the machines and networks that create and disseminate them. It should be no surprise that artists feel the need to investigate the reception and production of images in the physical world, to call our attention to the occupation of space by images, and to look at both how we got here and where we can go. (Schultz, 2011, p. 17).



Fig 10: Orit Hofshi: *Convergence* (2011), Installation, Spoon printed woodcuts, carved pine wood boards, metal basins of oil and wooden viewing platform.



The Canadian Artist Sean Caulfield also presents his printing blocks in installations, which often result out of collaborations with his colleague Royden Mills (Fig 11). Caulfield's artistic intention is rooted in the presentation of scientific illustrations, both historical and fictional, that skirt the boundary between biology and technology. His images evoke the history of science, but also mythic references and echoes. They move freely between abstraction and representation (Caulfield, 2015, p. 39). Especially in his large format installations, Caulfield alludes to a time when woodcuts were still an essential part of the printing process used for books:

My interest in using the medium of woodblock relates to its history as one of the earliest forms of printing, and to the fact that some of the oldest scientific/medical illustrations where produced using this technique. In relation to this I often exhibit my actual woodblocks (as sculptural objects) together in order to create a monumental 'book' that reminds viewers of the weight of the scientific knowledge found in this history of the printed image. Likewise, I am also interested in exploring the tactile, hand-made quality of the woodblock image, which stands in contrast to digital printing technology of today... In creating drawings, prints and installations I attempt to create a multifaceted and conceptually layered experience for viewers that reflects the sense of hope and anxiety that society often feels in relation to the possible impacts of new technology. (Caulfield, 2015, p. 39)



Fig 11: Sean Caulfield & Royden Mills: Surface Tension (2013).

This short, selected study of the history of the woodcut shows that the developments that printmaking has undergone, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

have made it possible for the technique, which in of itself is a method of reproduction, to produce prints that can be understood as unique and one of a kind. Since HAP Grieshaber's work at the latest, every activity that proceeds the result has been understood as an artistic act in of itself. Thus in contemporary art the division of artist and craftsman is no longer valid: 'for the modern artistic woodcut there is no longer a distinction between the drawn design and the artisanal realization' (own translation) (Gercken, 2000, p. 23). Just as high a meaning is ascribed to the printing process as to the carving. Thus a clear division between print, image and object arises (Gercken, 2000, p. 24). The working process and the work are no longer understood as separate entities, but rather as single coherent unit, as holistic union of elements that are always communicating with one another (again and again). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century a sculptural view of the printing block manifested itself, transforming it from a mere medium for the form to an independent sculpture – a development that led the way to 'a new form of dialogue between 'wood' and print' (own translation) (Köser-Rudolph, 2000, p. 56).

### **2.3. Excursus on (Non Woodcut-)Printmaking in Contemporary Practice**

Looking at printmaking in general and not just the woodcut in particular, the most recent contemporary positions show that artists working in printmaking have begun to take an increasingly freer approach to different media and techniques. This section, in the form of an excursus, will examine several typical printmaking approaches, in which the treatment or the presentation of the printing block or the printing plate plays a central role. The way these positions treat the printing block overlaps to some degree with my work or woodcut method. However, it should be stressed that a direct relationship in the sense of an original unity of print and printing block – as is the case in my work – is not to be found in these works.

An example of this are the monumental installations from the series *A Sign in Space* by the Swedish Artist Gunilla Klingberg (b. 1966). The source

materials for these works are steel cylinder, which the artist then covers with carved lorry tyre treads. These are then used as printing blocks (Fig 12). The images are printed in a sandy surface with the help of a motor vehicle. The images are formed from a composite of the tyre patterns, for example at the Art biennale in Urdaibai, Spain. With these prints in sand, their destruction, e.g. through the ebb and flow of the tides, is integral to the work (Klingberg, 2015). When shown in a gallery, strips of sand are printed with the unadulterated steel cylinders.



Fig 12: Gunilla Klingberg: *A Sign in Space* (2012-2014), steel cylinder, tyre pattern, w = 280 cm, Ø 105 cm, installation view Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin.

The Mexican artist Betsabee Romero (b. 1963) addresses political themes in her printmaking. In her installation *Always finding another cage* she draws attention to the situation in Mexico where a large number of traffic accidents are caused by the failure to carry out routine maintenance of public busses, especially that the tyres are rarely changed. Romero uses old tyres and cuts images of native flowers and bird into their surface. She then prints these tyres on long tracks that has fixed running up to the ceiling of the exhibition space (Fig 13/14): 'The birds take symbolic flight across the walls and ceiling of the gallery on an imprint of the tread that extends from each tire on long sheets of translucent paper...' (Moore College of Art & Design, 2010).





Fig 13 + 14: Betsabee Romero: Always finding another cage (2010), Carved public transportation tires, prints on wire mesh.

The Chinese artist Qiu Zhijie (b. 1969) also plays on socially relevant themes. In his project *Monuments* (2007), he reflects on the tradition of printed images in China, but also on the way in which personal and collective memory become interwoven with one another (Fig 15). To accomplish this he begins by collecting and classifying different pieces of writing, both public and private. He then transfers these onto concrete plates, lets them dry and finally prints the writing with ink on steel plates. Afterwards he *destroys* the individual printing plates by applying a new layer of concrete in a separate step. Next he once again inscribes new letters in the freshly laid concrete, lets it dry, prints etc. In this way, each printing plate *deletes* or *covers* the previous one. Only the prints still bear witness to the existence of the original that came before, that is to say the individual printing plates (Philagrafika, 2010).

Each new layer obliterated the previous one, burying the marks forever and replacing them with a new form of scripture; the only witness that remains is the single print, done with the traditional rubbing process that entails placing a sheet of paper on top of the stele. *Monuments* is a powerful overview of China's political history as well as a reflection on the capacity of monuments of retaining collective memory. (Philagrafika, 2010)

The continually reworked printing plate, which due to the successive countless layers of concrete has taken on the form of a concrete block, was presented in front of the prints which were mounted on the wall when the piece was shown at Philagrafika 2010.



Fig 15: Qiu Zhijie: Monuments: Revolutionary Slogans of Successive Dynasties (2007), Concrete and steel.

These examples from the area of printmaking also exhibit certain similarities with my work: including the *burying* of the printing block described above, which is also employed in some of my own site-specific installations. In terms of the common origin of the print and printing block there are however fundamental differences with my work that will become clear when these aspects are more closely examined later in this study.

## 2.4. Finding My Own Woodcut Method

Despite the initial focus on the topic of sculpture, there has always been an interest in finding my own approach to the woodcut. However, numerous initial attempts were ultimately unsatisfying – perhaps because they were still operating on a classic two-dimensional plane. The path to my own way and technique to deal with the woodcut evolved more by detour – as so often is

the case with creative processes. In late 1994, the sculptural idea of creating a cylindrical printing block that could be moved by a y-shape metal handle emerged – it was something akin to hand driven the asphalt rollers used in road construction in former times. A self-developed system of writing was then to be cut into a cylindrical printing block in order to maybe print on the floor or on some other base. Above all else, it was actually a sculptural idea, hence the implied graphic question was viewed as a peripheral matter. After extensive research, a wood-processing plant was found where a segment of a tree trunk could be peeled radially (Fig 16/17). When the segment of a tree trunk was peeled open, thus dividing the trunk into a peeled wooden sheet and a cylinder, it was – nunc stans – a very special moment since the imaginable possibilities and the significance of what was just discovered in the wake of this decision became clear. The significance of what had been discovered and invented dawned immediately. It was a moment of nearly mystical identification. Moreover, there was an impressing sensuality: a still warm, literally steaming, tree trunk, out of which moisture seeped continuously during the peeling process. This was the sap naturally contained in the trunk. Highly agitated and in a state of joyful excitement, I drove back to my studio with the rolled leaves of wood and the cylindrical printing block. Nonetheless, there was a significant uncertainty: How would such a sheet of wood behave when hung on a wall? Would the cohesion be maintained or would its own weight be too much causing the sheet eventually breaks into pieces? If the answers to these questions were yes, then the discovery of my own sculptural method of executing a woodcut was clear. The answer was – thanks to the muse – positive.

## 2.5. Explanation of My Own Woodcut Method

This section will now provide a detailed explanation of my woodcut method, which is in principle the method used in all my woodcut works<sup>18</sup>:

From the trunk section of a tree very thin leaves of wood are peeled off radially. This form of an initial technical woodcut generates two elements: First, very delicate and fragile leaves – as desired, these may be less than 0,1cm or more than 3cm in thickness. Second, a cylinder, which will serve as the printing block in what follows – this means it is de facto heavy enough to exercise the necessary pressure.



Fig 16: A trunk of a tree in front of the studio (1998).

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<sup>18</sup> This method is also used for the so-called *anonymous woodcuts*, in which only the printed leaves are featured and the printing block is absent from the presentation. Of course in these cases the wooden rollers described here were used in the printing process.

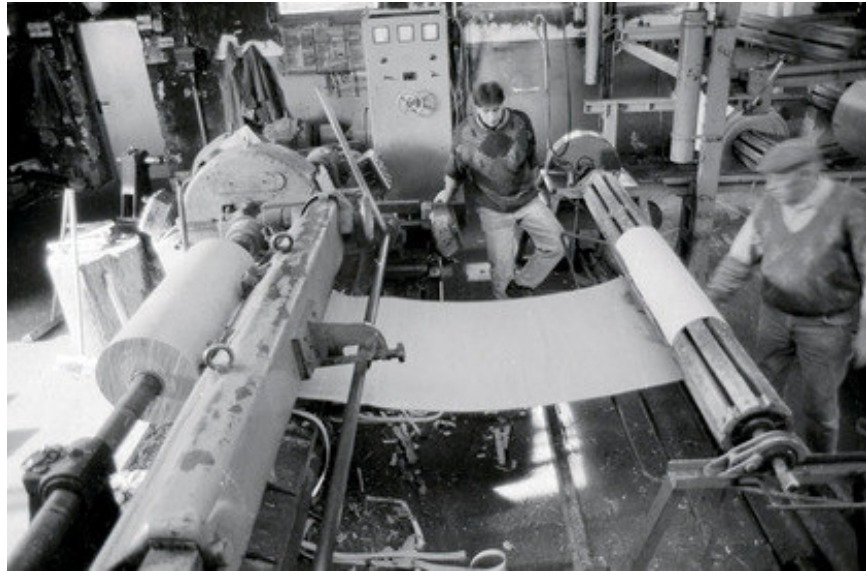


Fig 17: Manufacturing process for the wooden leaves and the resulting wooden cylinder in a Westphalian factory (1998).

The printing *block* (unlike in English, the German term *Druckstock* fittingly refers to a stick, *Stock*) is in this case in fact – in keeping with the actual sense of the German word – a round, oblong piece of wood. This is provided with a negative form, and then covered with ink or some other printing substance and rolled over the wooden leaves lying on the floor, whose surface have meanwhile dried out slightly. Afterwards the printing block becomes sculpturally autonomous and is placed in relationship to the prints in various ways. All of the material parameters needed for these unique woodcuts are inherent to the tree. It is a closed system. To put it in poetic terms, it is a *redoubled unique*.

To establish a basis for the further course of this investigation – and to avoid any possible misunderstandings – the technical details and terms used will be explained here:

- a) Printing block: the term printing block always refers to the (cylindrical) wooden roller that results from the process describe above. The weight of the printing blocks varies between 220lb and 1102lb.
- b) Wooden leaves or wooden tracks: the radially peeled leaves from the tree trunk – which can be paper thin – are termed wood leaves. This is

an etymologically precise term and is not a word of my own creation.<sup>19</sup>

The wooden leaves or tracks – used when dealing with longer sections – are printed on. The wooden leaves can then in the end result be classified as the print or stock for printing.

- c) Printing ink or substance: printing is done almost exclusively with white or black ink – mostly manufactured myself – or so-called printing substances in the case of colorless printing. By using substances such as gum arabic or pure acrylics the print application appears transparent, on the boundary of that which is visible – for example to let the unique appearance of the wooden leaves speak for themselves.<sup>20</sup>

## **2.6. The Distinction between My Woodcut Method and Conventional Printmaking**

In the present investigation, it seems to be necessary to briefly outline the differences between my method and conventional, overwhelmingly paper-based printmaking. Conventional printmaking mostly concentrates on the paper that will be printed or the industrially produced stock for printing, is almost endless in terms of number of reproductions and reduces the printing block for the most part (though there are some exceptions) to a just tool in the manufacturing process – a means to an end, not an end in itself. In contrast the printing block in my method is both: a means to an end and an end in itself. Both parameters – print and printing block – meet as equals. The reproduction is bound up with the economy of each individual tree, i.e. only a few wooden leaves can be carved out of a small tree trunk. Another significant difference has to do with the texture of the individual printing block and the corresponding stock for printing (paper vs. wooden leaves). The distinctive feature of the printing block and stock for printing used in paper-based printmaking – which are as a rule industrial products – is that they

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<sup>19</sup> The hastily chosen term *veneer* initially used for the wooden leaves is not quite accurate as the designation *veneer* is tied to a particular functional context: to cover a (supposedly) low quality wood with a thin layer of (supposedly) high quality wood. Only in this context can the term *veneer* be used.

<sup>20</sup> This appearance is at times heavily iridescent: the leaves can sometimes be fine, delicate and perfectly flat and then at other times raw, coarse and relief-like.

posses homogenous surfaces. Both parameters printing block and stock for printing in my own method are, due to the natural growth of the wood in the tree, fundamentally heterogenous. The respective surfaces sometimes exhibit strong structural differences. Ultimately these structural differences have to do with the pattern of growth in the particular tree trunk. The myriad of factors – which also need to be taken in consideration some of the time – present an extremely complex pattern of interaction: composition of the soil, nutrients available, damp or dry location, sunlight, wind etc. up to and including exactly when the tree is felled, the ideal time for my purposes being the full moon<sup>21</sup>. As a consequence these various factors and conditions lead to a printing process that is marked on a fundamental level by an aleatoric (chance) component. This also applies equally to the steps following the printing process. The printing step itself can not proceed in such a precise and predictable manner as in conventional woodcuts – especially when mechanical printing presses are employed. In my own process just a fifth of the prints can be considered successful. In summary the differences are: limited availability and reproducibility vs. almost unlimited reproducibility, homogeneity of the surface vs. heterogeneity of the surface, equal treatment of the print and printing block (necessitated by the original unity in a single tree) vs. reduction of the printing block to a tool.

## **2.7. Critical Reception of My Work**

In the following summary of the reception of my work, it has to first of all be pointed out that there are numerous reviews of exhibitions, but that an international recognition of the work only came about with the development of the *Chiasma* cycle (2003). Thus the Swiss art historian Christian Rümelin, director of the Graphic Collection at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire Geneva, referred explicitly to the solo exhibition *Chiasma (II)*, which was shown at the

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<sup>21</sup> According to various agricultural studies, there is a correlation between plant growth and the phases of the moon. The connection between the waxing and waning moon and the rising and sinking of the tree sap has been demonstrated. In addition this provides evidence for the durability and resistance of wood felled during a full moon phase (cf. e.g. Spieß, 2002, pp. 2-3).

Goethe Institute in Kyoto (Japan) as well as in other galleries, in the journal *Print Quarterly* in 2005:

In contemporary German woodcut, the use of large blocks and their presentation alongside the final print is infrequent, although the practice is known and used by some printmakers. But to create a close relation between the printing support and the material used for the print itself is a new and individual approach. (Rümelin, 2005, p. 458)

Rümelin also emphasized the unique nature of the artistic process in a concept paper for series of solo exhibitions planned at the time:

Christoph Loos represents one of the most radical positions on contemporary woodcuts today... Even if there are comparable tendencies in the use of unconventional printing blocks and media that have been around since the 1960s (think of work featuring plexiglass, foil (including metal foil), prints with polymer plates, cardboard and other), Loos's approach yield an unparalleled radicalization of the formal, material and physical connection of printing block and print by the use of the material that is ultimately the most original, wood. (Rümelin, 2005, p. 458)

The English artist and professor at the University of Arts London Paul Coldwell (\*1952) on the other hand emphasizes the sculptural and transformative character of the print and printing block. In his book *Printmaking: A Contemporary Perspective* published in 2010, he wrote:

Sculpture and printmaking become inseparable in these works and act as a reminder of the shared concerns between these two disciplines both in terms of their materiality and in the manner in which the materials themselves are manipulated and are the subject of transformation. (Coldwell, 2010, p. 130)

In the exhibition book developed for the showing of *Chiasma (II)* in the Suermondt Ludwig Museum in Aachen, the Director of the Graphic Collection, the German art historian Dagmar Preising (2005a, p. 7) speaks about my woodcut technique, which should not only be seen as an 'extremely interesting and completely singular approach to the topic of the woodcut today'. Preising also emphasizes – independently of Christian Rümelin – the radicalism inherent to the work:



One might also perceive allusions to Japanese paper architecture in Loos's works, which represent a very individual and radically innovative approach to the woodcut. The artist reverts to the technique of the woodcut, which has been practiced for over six centuries but only seldom employed since the onset of the avant-garde period, altering its power of expressing by placing it in a context in which it was previously unknown. The way the artist directly allows the medial process of relief printing to be reflected in the objects themselves is highly unusual. Loos combines the printing block and the printed image in an entity with a new meaning. This synthesis draws on both the processes of relief printing and sculptural production, and it is characterized by a certain ambivalence and shifting between these classic genres, a result of the artist's activities as both a printmaker and a sculptor. (Preising, 2005b, p. 26)

In addition Preising refers explicitly to the characteristic use of hidden prints when she writes:

While the visibility of a work of art is now one of its essential components, Loos's treatment of images reflects medieval practices, in which works of art were primarily cult objects. ...The practice of enshrouding images and cult objects, which became most palpable in late medieval, winged altarpieces, which could alternately be opened and closed, was intended to heighten the preciousness and meaning of the objects that were obscured. This also seems to be true of Christoph Loos' obscurations. However, today in the absence of a collective system of reference, we need the words of the artist to reveal the real core of the rolls of wood. ... Christoph Loos's concept of art, which is not based on the appearance but on the real presence of objects, has its roots in a cultic use of images and represents a completely singular approach. (Preising, 2005b, p. 29)

On the other hand concerning the aesthetic aspects of the works presented in Aachen, she wrote:

In their delicacy and the highly aesthetic quality, Christoph Loos's woodcuts are reminiscent of Japanese paper architecture. (Preising, 2005a, p. 7).

The Japanese curator and author Goji Hamada (\*1944), one of the most important performance artists in his country, also saw a connection to historical models in the *Chiasma* series of works, although in a completely different way than Preising. He described the woodcut method used as an allegory of history:

Loos's works mark a turning point in civilization that one might also call the Gutenberg-phenomenon. It represents nothing less than the development of a system when Loos separates a tree... into sheets of veneer... and a cylindrical trunk..., thereby turning this part of the trunk into a printing block to be used in printing on the veneer. Thus a system is developed, in which both the printing block and the sheets of veneer are born of the same tree, and ink is applied to the printing block in this form and a woodcut is produced. When approaching the work created through this process one is struck by its astonishingly primal expression – ultimately an allegory for the creation of the first woodcut. (Hamada, 2000, p. 75)

Regarding the circumstance that the previously mentioned art-scientific elaboration first and foremost followed the step towards conceptualizing in my own oeuvre, it is particularly interesting that the essay that was published in my art-book *ZimZum*, titled "Absence of Origin, or the Patience of the Very Last Question. Christoph Loos's Woodcuts as Approaches to a new Meta-Language" (own translation) by the art-scientist Karin Stempel contained already in the year 2000 prophetic statements:

Without a doubt, works by Christoph Loos are in keeping with the tradition of the woodcut, even though this ancient printing technique is both used and reflected in his works in an unusual manner. In this way, a totally new significance is attached to this seemingly pure craftsman's technique within the structural meaning of the works, a factor that is decisive for their comprehension. A far cry from simply being a technique for producing images and image reproductions – the way it has been used since the 15th century – in these works, the woodcut turns into a meta-language, in which through the reflection of the conditions of the (re-)production of the image, the (re-)production of the conditions of the image is made visible at the same time. / Form, which is form, continues to produce form, whereby in this symbiotic association, opposites blend into one another, just as separations and connections are partially dissolved and new mutual relationships come about, forming their figures and structures beyond languages. This occurs simultaneously and equally with the coexistence of void and abundance, presence and absence, sign and non-sign. / The vocabulary of these works, which arises entirely from the obvious logic of the genesis of the form, contains and comprises the "reverse" of this process as well, namely the destruction of the natural organic form. This may be interpreted as a metaphor for an image genesis, which is open to both sides. In this duality of opposite aspects, the image defies the logic of language and undermines its clarity by perpetually transforming its horizon of meaning, transcending it, and ultimately shifting it into infinity. In this respect, the image means neither form nor motif, but the individual work as a whole, consisting of different elements that communicate with one another across a distance. The image is only created through this distance as an imaginary relationship, an incorporeal body inserted into the void,

like the quietness between the words where what may not be said is articulated in silence. (own translation) (Stempel, 2000: 61)

## **2.8. Résumé**

Based on the brief overview of the history of the woodcut, the crucial differences between the technique of the woodcut practiced up to now and the woodcut method employed in my works have been illustrated. A common origin in the state of unity of the print and the printing block and the resulting implications seen in my work are new to art and printmaking. Therefore we may speak of a (re-)invention of the woodcut, which is clearly distinct from the conventional or paper-based printmaking – a view that is moreover supported by the art historical reception of the work and can be put forth as a unique – up to this point in time – contribution to the field.

### 3. Unity, Division, Difference – Unity,...

‘...*Shape* and *anti-shape* united in one and the same operative dispositif of morphogenesis.’

(Georges Didi-Huberman)<sup>22</sup>

#### 3.1. Introduction

The historical synopsis of the relationship between print and printing block has shown how important the concept of *unity* is for my own special approach to the woodcut. Indeed the unique feature of the work can be found in the common origin of the print and printing block which lends them their distinctive characteristic of unity. Accordingly, the main focus of the following reflection will not be so much based on an artistic printmaking viewpoint, as it will be an examination of these themes from the perspective of the material-physiological and technical requirements or circumstances and the implications connected with them.

First, we must try to look beyond the mediating element in the printing process – for example the substance, paint or ink used to create the print. The main point of interest arises from the unity and difference of the print and printing block, which have been cleaved from the *physis* of the same tree trunk, thus this concept of unity is perhaps first and foremost a result of this natural relationship. The Installation *Ektropie (Negentropie)* (1998) (Fig 18) presents a prototypical example for the concept of unity in my work. The central element of the work is an aspen tree trunk, from which the wooden strips are peeled and which was later fashioned into a printing block. This printing block was in turn used to print the strips of wood. The distinctive feature of the wooden leaves and the printing block is therefore their common origin, which can be labeled a relationship of unity and evokes the concept of *identity*. At the same time both are indeed wrested away from their original context and form distinct entities – they are characterized by unity as well as difference. This aspect links all the printmaking works in my oeuvre. In the

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<sup>22</sup> Didi-Huberman, 1999, p. 32 (own translation).

installation *Ektropie (Negentropie)*, the arrangement of the prints and printing block highlights the unity-difference. The printing block is fixed on the wall and appears to be a rolled up scroll made of a strip of wood unfurling onto the floor, which simulates the original state of unity in the tree trunk.



Fig 18: Christoph M. Loos: *Ektropie (Negentropie)* (1998), Woodcut on aspen wood leaves with printing block, 620 x 350 x 52cm.

To shed light on this subject, this chapter will begin by examining the concepts of *unity* and *difference*. Building on this, the term *identity* will be examined, in the sense of an identity which is to be verified. The argumentation will coalesce into a treatment of the concept of *mimesis*. All four mentioned categories (*unity*, *difference*, *identity* and *mimesis*) are heavy weights of cultural history and philosophy and as such we will only be able to scratch the surface of these broad concepts. Tellingly, the easiest approach – by the virtue of being less dangerous, more fundamental and more openly structured – is not references to philosophical texts but rather a downright classical mythical figure.

In his *Symposium*, Plato (189d) relates the myth of the androgynous spherical creatures as told by the poet Aristophanes. According to this creation myth, human nature ‘was by no means the same as it is now’.

Aristophanes claims that in the beginning there were three not two sexes: males, female and a combinations the other two. This third sex has however disappeared. Aristophanes describes the form of this amalgam – the male-female – as follows:

Secondly, the form of each person was round all over, with back and sides encompassing it every way; each had four arms, and legs to match these, and two faces perfectly alike on a cylindrical neck. There was one head to the two faces, which looked opposite ways; there were four ears, two privy members, and all the other parts, as may be imagined, in proportion.  
(Plato, 189e-190a)

According to Aristophanes the origin of the masculine is in the sun, the feminine in the earth and the male-female in the moon. The unity of these three sexes led to great strength but also to wickedness, which drove the gods to take action. Instead of killing the unities of human nature, the gods decided to weaken humans by dividing the unities. This was the origin of men and women, who form only half of human nature and who must unite to reproduce offspring. This is how Aristophanes explains the purpose of love between people: 'Thus anciently is mutual love ingrained in mankind, reassembling our early estate and endeavoring to combine two in one and heal the human sore' (Plato, 191d-e).

This myth of Aristophanes can be seen as an allegory for the original oneness and the reunification in the printing process of the two poles of print and printing block. The fact that they are first divided and then brought back together in the printing process lends them a transformative power and strength. They complement one another – much like the Chinese concept of yin and yang, which embodies the opposing and at the same time complementary nature of two poles.

### **3.2. What is the Meaning of Unity in the Context of the Work?**

As already mentioned at the outset of this chapter, my work is characterized by the singularity, which is typified by the special emphasis placed on an

integral-genealogical concept of unity<sup>23</sup> in the respective woodcut pieces. The affinity of print and printing block – in contrast to traditional printmaking – does not only reveal itself in the actual moment of contact in the printing process. As a result of the fact that the print and printing block share a common origin in the same tree trunk, they are also actual fragments of an original relationship of unity. After the prints and the printing block have been carved out of the tree trunk, this relationship of unity is distinguished by a loss of the origin and a simultaneous contact with the origin.

The term *unity* has been dealt with in philosophy since antiquity. A broad exploration of the various theories is beyond the scope of the present work. The following will focus on a few selected positions most relevant to the work at hand.

The philosopher Odo Marquard (1990, p. 2) has pointed out that the tradition of unitary or universalists philosophies from Parmenides to Habermas is characterized by the conceit that unity has precedence over multiplicity:

The basic thesis going through these works – grossly simplified – is that perfection is – through its lack of multiplicity – the one and only, or alternatively the one in many, the general. Wherever diversity prevails, it is a damaged place that must be repaired: it must be universalized, totalized, globalized, equalized, emancipated, revolutionized. If this is not successful, it falls into crisis. (own translation) (Marquard, 1990, p. 2)

Thus according to Marquard (1990, p. 2), the pluralistic philosophies of multiplicity are, in contrast, distinguished by a ‘precedence of the many over the one’. To quote a philosopher – to name just one – whom Marquard often returns to: the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas (\*1929) describes and interprets the theory of *unity* in the *Enneads* of Plotinus in the following way:

*To hen panta* (τὸ ἓν πάντα) does not mean that everything merges into the ‘One’, but rather that the ‘Many’ leads back to the ‘One’ and can thus on the whole be perceived as a totality. Through this powerful abstraction, the

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<sup>23</sup> To avoid any confusion of terminology, the term *genealogical* needs to be explained briefly. As a rule *genealogical* is used to designate a familial relationship. The term is also used in this sense in this context based on the conviction that *genealogical* need not only be thought of in anthropological terms but can also be expanded to include *nature* in general.

human spirit is able to attain an extramundane point of reference – a perspective that allows for distance, from which the dynamic in one another and against one another of concrete circumstances and phenomena coalesce into a sturdy whole which transcends the inconstant course of events. ...The world in singular implies one origin, and namely one that is no longer of the same kind as the plurality of primal forces locked in battle found in mythology. (own translation) (Habermas, 1990, p.11)

The Unity can therefore be understood as an articulated whole.

It is relatively difficult to find comparable examples in contemporary art that revolve around a concept of unity – not to mention in the field of print making. A possible point of reference is the German sculptor Ulrich Rückriem (\*1938), whose work will be examined briefly, before delving deeper into an example of my own work. Rückriem has been creating so-called split stones (Stein-Teilungen) since 1968 (Fig 19). He smashes, saws apart or splits natural stone blocks, either according to a mathematical unit of measurement or ‘according to a unit of measurement present in the material or a unit of measurement that is dependent on one’s own body’ (own translation) (Ulbricht, 1973, p. 7). In the end Rückriem reassembles the parts and fixes them into place so that the division is only visible in fine cracks: ‘Idea, working process and result are a unity, which is however not destroyed or knock out of balance by the realization’ (Ulbricht, 1973, p. 8). Referring to the Ulrich Rückriem’s Heine Monument in Bonn, the art historian Werner Hofmann wrote:

Through the working process, the stone recaptures its wholeness on a higher level – reflected, thus broken, which represents a manual as well as a spiritual act of creation. This initial, original wholeness is transformed into an ultimate unity: from the dead material a man-made order that nevertheless retains its elemental materiality. (own translation) (Hofmann, 1987, p. 315)





Fig 19: Ulrich Rückriem: A granite block split in 3 pieces. The middle part cut in 4 pieces. All pieces put together to the original block shape. The lower part embedded into the earth as foundation (own translation) (1982).

The art historian Jürgen Hohmeyer argues along similar lines:

The splitting is presented as an expressly past event or possible future occurrence. The blocks were split, and they could be split apart once more but always with the prospect that they will once again be joined together. This in particular thematizes the unity of the total volume. It transcends the static involuntary, self-evident state and presents a vivid object of an interplay of forces. (own translation) (Hohmeyer, 1988, p. 29)

These interpretations of Rückriem's work show implicitly the affinity and correspondence to the above mentioned printmaking techniques: print and printing block were – in nature – one, but they were then split, processed and placed in a new context. In parallel to the dividing character of this process, it could also be argued that the common bond or the unity and the common origin of the parts have become the focal point and are thus amplified. The fragments of the tree trunk in my work are no longer an autonomous part of a unity, but rather create a sort of charged field that allows energy to flow freely. This will now be demonstrated in the installation *Sleep of the Martian drum player / Im Schlaf des Marstrommlers* (1999) (Fig 20):

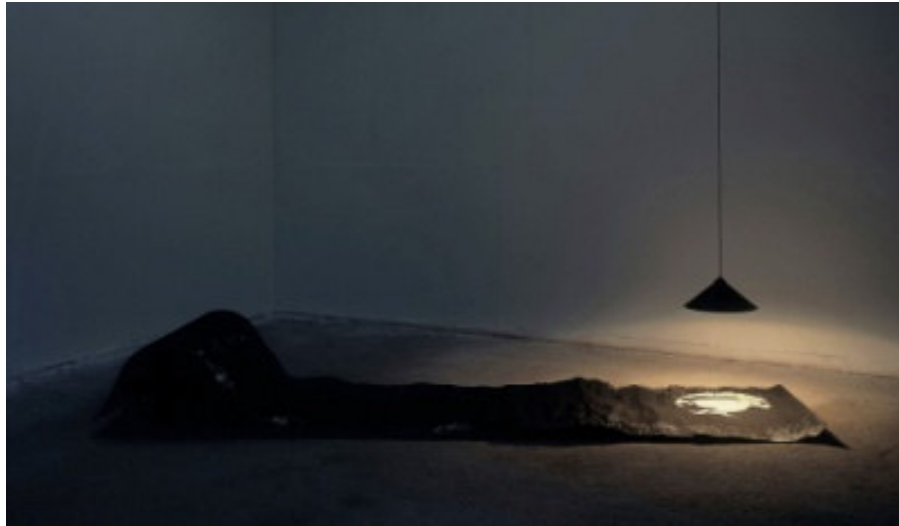


Fig 20: Christoph M. Loos: Sleep of the Martian drum player / Im Schlaf des Marstrommlers (1999), woodcut on aspen on aspen wood leaves with printing block, light, 420 x 43 x 107cm.

In this installation an arrangement can be seen on the floor that is made up of the printing block lying on its side and the leaves of wood that have been printed black. While one end of the printed leaf of wood is laid on top of the printing block, its surface is illuminated on the opposite side by a lamp hanging above. Print and printing block no longer share their original relationship within a tree trunk. In the commonality – a moment of contact retained in the presentation – their unity is confronted with their difference. The cross which has been cut out of the printing block (this feature is difficult to see in the figure) embodies the motive of crossing over, thereby underlining the gesture of entanglement inherent to the work. Just like the many leads back to the one in the Platonic school of thought, so too should print and printing block be understood in my work as a part of a totality. Their presentation, which – in the case of *Sleep of the Martian drum player* – are not only placed together, but are also shown in *mutual embrace*, evoking both the former unity in a tree trunk as well as creating a new or perhaps alternative form of unity.

### 3.3. What is the Meaning of Difference in the Context of the Work?

From the moment in the technical manufacturing process of my woodcuts when the trunk is cut and divided into leaves of wood on the one side and the cylindrical, roller shaped core, a difference is present. The difference is, in the first place, a prerequisite and a facilitator that, after the more or less first technical woodcut, lets the subsequent artistic woodcut be carried out. All further steps in the working process deal with the state of difference, the divided and the dissected. Accordingly, the next section will explore the concept of difference.

The concept of difference can be seen clearly in the installation *March of the barbarians / Aufmarsch der Barbaren* (1996) (Fig 21-23). The installation consists of four woodcuts arranged in adjacent rows along the wall and a printing block split in four in the middle space. The wholeness of the form of the divided printing block does indeed recreate a certain kind of unity of itself, nevertheless there is a difference present in the four fragments. So the point here in this example is not only to present the fundamental difference between print and printing block or wooden leaves and roller, but rather to also ponder the wholeness of the printing block cylinder, which is nevertheless in the course of the working process differentiated or split apart. These two events of differentiation must be taken into consideration in the viewing of the work. For the sake of clarity, the interpretation concentrates on the treatment of the printing block in the working and presentation process in the installation *March of the Barbarians*. The printing block was quartered, and the outer sides of the four pieces of the printing block were turned inward so that its form as seen from outside no longer appeared to be circular or cylindrical.



Fig 21: Christoph M. Loos: March of the barbarians / Aufmarsch der Barbaren (1996), printing block.



Fig 22 + 23: Christoph M. Loos: March of the barbarians / Aufmarsch der Barbaren (1996), woodcut on aspen wood leaves, each 175 x 260cm.

The term *difference* as the foil to unity comes from the Latin *differentia*, and it indicates a distinguishing mark or dissimilarity (Hoffmeister, 1995, p. 167). While Aristotle anchors the term *differentia* in his *Metaphysics* as the condition that distinguishes a species from another, genus or relation (Met. 1018A12), the philosopher Thomas Aquinas for example distinguishes various forms of difference which include among others the *differentia specifica* and the *differentia diversitas*.

An approach that is particularly interesting in the context of the present discussion is the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) understanding of difference, according to which the individual can only be understood through its relation to the whole. In classical metaphysics, that which exists is thought of in terms difference, 'while it is ultimately thought of in terms of being. Being is thought of in the sense of the *genitivus subjectivus* as the being of that which exists; at the same time however..., that which exists is invariably thought of in the sense of the *genitivus obiectivus* as that which exists of being' (own translation) (Karimi, 2012, p. 143). Accordingly, the difference can be thought of on the one hand as an event and at the same time as an execution. The inner structure of difference is on top of this a bond: 'the 'differentiation' can be expressed more precisely as 'difference', which shows how that which exists and being are somehow supported by one another, divorced and equally related to one another, and this is something intrinsic not just a result of an 'act of differentiation' (own translation) (Karimi, 2012, p. 145). According to the philosopher (of religion) Ahmad Milad Karimi, being and that which exists are simultaneously dividing and dependent on one another. The difference is therefore an 'expression of the inner dynamic of all ontology' (own translation) (Karimi, 2012, p. 146).

This very productive and possibly also unconventional sounding understanding of difference is further amplified and expanded upon by the German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels' concept of *diastasis*. *Diastasis* (Greek: splitting, standing apart) describes initially a time-space displacement. According to Waldenfels, time and space reinvent themselves in the *diastasis*, only then do they take on 'a radical temporal meaning if we [combine] the precedence of a renewed capacity for movement with an ex post facto answer producing effect' (own

translation) (Waldenfels, 2004, 178). This hints, on the one hand, at the breaks in the inherent synchronicity, but even more that the development of space and time goes hand and hand with the development of a self and an other. According to Waldenfels this creates a non-place, a 'place of shortage, which is deprived of any interpretation and purpose but still ensures that there is something to say and something to do' (own translation) (Waldenfels, 2004, p. 10).<sup>24</sup>

In the installation *March of the Barbarians*, the quadrants seem to possess a certain hermetic quality and wholeness when seen from outside and create their own space from within, this is indeed in the sense that was described in connection with *diastasis* – a place, more a non-place, difficult to see, yet existing/present-at-hand, with an inner dynamic and a potential that transcends itself.

### **3.4. Excursus: Exploration of the Term Identity in the Context of the Work**

Print and printing block, originally a unity in the tree, are split and undergo a division in the course of the initial technical woodcut and the first technical process of stripping of the wood. This division through its oscillating gesture has proved to be productive for the work and its perception. Nevertheless this brings up the question of identity in the sense of the original meaning of the term from the latin root *idem*, which can be translated as *the same*, especially when this serves to designate an individual. The concept of *identity* will be examined in the form of an excursus. In this context, the in-dividual tree at some point ceases to exist, it is no longer not divided (Latin: *individere*) but rather is divided. What makes up the identity of the two separate parts? Are they still always the same (in the sense of *semper idem*) because they come from the same root (here *root* refers to both the botanical root of the tree but also the genealogical root), or are they – as a result of the division which has been

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<sup>24</sup> Incidentally, it should be noted that the concept of *diastasis* is related to the term *différance* as used by Deleuze and Derrida.

executed – no longer identical, form independent entities and are as such are called to assert their own identity? The *print* identity as a matrix or image to be imprinted and the *printing block* identity as an imaging seal or prototype? Clearly this question can not be answered as print and printing block irrefutably retain their parity on a purely material-physical level, maintaining their identity and are as such still *the same*. However the division has the effect of assigning functions now giving rise to a formal print and printing block, and this in turn does indeed create a new autonomous identity. In this respect we can speak about the parallel presence of a *sameness* and an *otherness*. Only when a very strict concept of identity, such as that forwarded by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), is taken as a basis is any and all identity resulting out of an act of division lost. The principle of identity of indiscernibles (*principium identitatis indiscernibilium*) says that ‘If A and B are indiscernible in all their properties, that is having the exact properties, then they can not be two different things, rather they are one and the same (identical)’ (own translation) (Liske, 200, p. 65). According to this definition things can only be identical if they prove to be indiscernible in all their properties.

As in many other works, *Codex Dissolutus (I)* (2006) (Fig 24) – *codex* (Latin: literally *block of wood* later denoting a block split into leaves or tablets for writing on, hence a book), *dissolutus* (Latin: dissolved) – also presents an arrangement of print and printing block. Thin, wavy leaves of wood are placed around the printing block. In terms of the question of identity, this juxtaposition and form of presentation make the *otherness* or the lack of identity clear. Moreover, print and printing block are positioned between two mirrors that are exactly parallel to one another. The arrangement of the installation is used to suggest or assert a *sameness* because in addition to the motive of wholeness of the (infinite) self reflecting mirror, the juxtaposition of the mirrors evokes a *reflective sameness*.

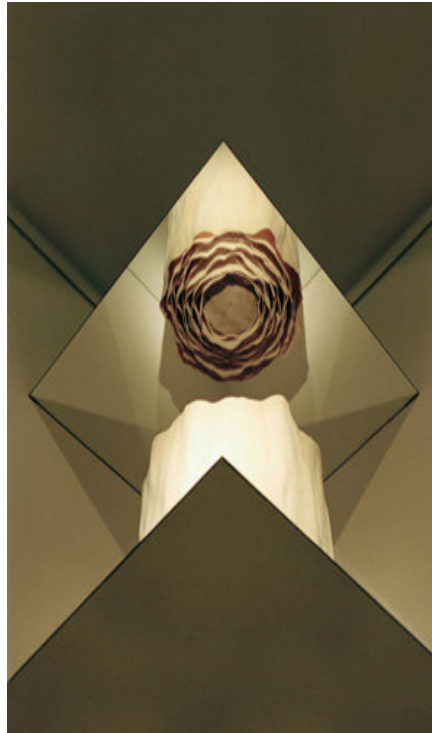


Fig 24: Christoph M. Loos: *Codex Dissolutus (I)* (2006), woodcut on aspen wood leaves with printing block, double mirror.

### 3.5. The Concept of Mimesis in the Context of the Work

The unique feature of my work is not only found in the common origin of print and printing block, which has already been mentioned but also in their common presentation, which in the context of particular pieces can indeed be understood as a search for the original unity. Or to hazard to name a literary equivalent: “À la recherche du temps perdu”.<sup>25</sup>

Similar to the arrangement of the strips of wood and printing block in the installation *Ektropie (Negentropie)* mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the installation *A machine for the annihilation of reality / Eine Maschine zur Vernichtung der Wirklichkeit* (1997) (Fig 25/26) stands out – especially in this context – due to its characteristic treatment of the similarity of print and printing block. The printing block is placed in the center of a slightly displaced central wooden track, which means that the printing block is present in the installation

<sup>25</sup> A reference to the novel *À la recherche du temps perdu / In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust, also translated as *Remembrance of Things Past* (1908/09).



and at the same time functions as a support for the unrolled wooden track. As the printing block is presented as the inner core in relation to the print, the original state of unity in the trunk as well as the process of stripping the wood are imitated.



Fig 25: Christoph M. Loos: A machine for the Annihilation of reality / Eine Maschine zur Vernichtung der Wirklichkeit (1997), Woodcut on aspen wood leaves with printing block, 600 x 345 x 48cm.

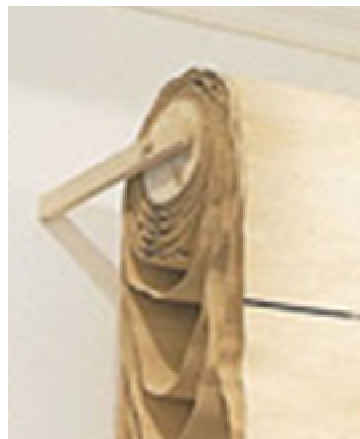


Fig 26: Christoph M. Loos: A machine for the annihilation of reality / Eine Maschine zur Vernichtung der Wirklichkeit (1997), detail.

This search for an original unity can be read in the sense of an *imitation* or *mimesis* – a concept that has appeared in art history in a various guises. The term *mimesis*, which can be traced back to the fifth century BC in Greece,

indicates an action aimed to imitate and is also translated as *imitation* (Hoffmeister, 1995, p. 404). Thus *mimesis* can be used to refer to direct imitation, e.g. dance, song or theater as well as meaning 'the reproduction of an image or an image of a person or other object in a material form' (Gebauer and Wulf, 1992, p. 44).

According to Aristotle – as discussed in detail in his *Poetics* – the imitative presentation of an action must be seen as an essential characteristic of art (cf. *Poetics* 1448b). He sees the motivation for this as being rooted in a universal human need for imitation. This functions on the basis of a certain similarity between the real and fictional world, which is also termed a structural homology. Almost in the sense of his *similia similibus*<sup>26</sup>, Aristotle ascribes a purifying power to *mimesis* in the sense of a *catharsis*. At this point it has to be left open whether *mimesis* should be viewed as a true catharsis or rather as an open play or even an illusionary play in the sense of an *effect de réel* (Roland Barthes).<sup>27</sup>

### 3.6. Reprise & Résumé

If the reader will indulge, I will end this chapter with reprise in the sense of a recapitulation. Here reprise means returning once again to remarks concerning Aristophanes' myth from the beginning. In the following quote the treatment of

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<sup>26</sup> The principle *similia similibus* (*similar by similar*) can be traced back to antiquity to Empedokles, Platon und Aristotle. While Empedokles started by similar is attracted emotionally to similar: 'Sweet grasps to weet and bitter to bitter, but to hot is connected to hot and warm and warm' (own translation) (Nestle, 1956: 136), Aristotle started differently. In his *Poetics* he assumes that in order that things can effect on other things they must be in some ways similar and in other ways different. Thus, he takes similarity as a partial sameness. For example, in his *Poetics* he states about tragedy that the arousal of fear and compassion that is caused by it can render a catharsis of dispositions (Rapp, 2009: 89). This example refers already to the thought of healing. Today the principle *similia similibus* finds application in particular in homoeopathy. Accordingly, symptoms of a disease can be healed by that kind of substances by which it has been caused: 'The Similia principle implies that substances that cause symptoms when applied to healthy biological systems, can also be used to treat diseased biological systems showing the above same symptoms' (Van Wijk/Wiegant, 2006: 1). The principles of *similia similibus solventur* used in organic chemistry states that similar dissolves in similar respectively the same can be dissolved in sameness.

<sup>27</sup> The French philosopher Roland Barthes (1915-1980) coined the term *effet de réel* to refer to a textual device when a narrator relates detailed descriptions of spaces or (non-linguistic) actions (Barthes, 2006, pp. 164-169). In an artistic context the term *effet de réel* is used among other things to indicate a kind of representation that is characterized by its affinity to scholarly discourse (Hammer-Tugendhat, 2009, p. 232).

print and printing block as described in this chapter can be seen not only as a physical, but even more as a spiritual or reflective relationship. In his text *Arcanum 17*, André Breton (1896-1966) describes a *unit of light* – this too could on the other hand be read very suggestively – as a metaphor for two lovers:

A very powerful myth continues to have a hold on me and no apparent contradiction of it in the course of my previous adventures can prevail. 'Find the place and the formula' merges with 'possess the truth in one soul and one body;' that highest hope has the power to unfold before it the allegorical arena which holds that every human being was thrown into life to search for a being of the opposite sex and only that one who is paired in all respects, to the point where one without the other seems like the result of the dissociation, of the dismembering of a unit of light. Happiest are those who succeed in reassembling this unit. ...the unit once rejoined thwarts any divisiveness by its very structure; it's characterized by the property that between the component parts there exists a foolproof physical and mental bond. (Breton 2004, pp. 50-51)

In summing up this chapter, it should be remembered that the concept of unity (*semper idem*), its implications on the one hand and the resulting endowment of meaning on the other hand should be seen as central to my own approach to the woodcut. Even the state of difference or the concept of difference – especially considering the background of the original unity – can be supposed to be something transcendent or connective: difference as a precondition for being able to even conceive unity and vice versa. Even in the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)*, in which the difference between the unity of print and printing block is especially prominent – as the printing block, for example, has been transformed beyond recognition – something of the original work is still present. The exploration of identity focussed on carving out a parallel presence of *sameness* and *otherness* and can in this respect again be seen as a mirror of the aforementioned levels. Finally, it could be shown how a productive – possibly even cathartic – concept of *mimesis* has been dealt with in some installations. Moreover, the concept of *mimesis* is the brace or fallback against the nexus of unity and as such brings the train of thought in this chapter the full circle.

## 4. À la recherche du temps perdue

‘...It was not only the emotion of mourning that we all know and recognize,..., like the end of the world, an emotion that overwhelms us each time we come across the surviving testimonies of the lost friend, across all the "images" that the one who has "passed away" has left or passed on to us.’

(Jacques Derrida)<sup>28</sup>

### 4.1. Introduction

The preceding chapter showed, that print and printing block in my own works served to order the characteristics of a unity in the sense of a totality, founded in the fact that they spring from the same tree trunk. It was apparent, through the trinity of *unity*, *difference* and *mimesis*, that my own printing works are characterized by a *search for a lost unity* founded in their difference, that is at times conferred through the idea of *imitation*. It is central to the work, that the *search for a lost unity* and the "loss of unity" are presupposed or opposed.<sup>29</sup>

The theme *loss of unity of print and printing block* in my own work can be assumed to be singular. Nevertheless, this chapter shall investigate, whether there are similarities or relations in other concepts of graphic reproduction. Moreover, the question prevails of whether the dimension of *wound* that belongs to the theme of the loss of unity can be used productively for the pictorial invention.

In order to work out the aspect of the loss of a unity, the decision was made to deviate from the characteristic style of investigation used so far, by consulting the essay "The Print and Impossible Mourning" by Australian artist Marian Crawford. Crawford, teaching at the faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, focuses in here on artistic works with the representation of loss and the process of mourning, paradigmatically in terms of themes such as biodiversity and environmental degradation. In her remarkable essay she investigates the question, whether

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<sup>28</sup> Derrida, 2003, p. 158 (own translation).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. chapter 3.5.

the process of printing, bound to include repetition and multiplicity, do indeed resonate with the idea of iteration present in the process of mourning.

#### 4.2. “The Print and Impossible Mourning”

In her essay "The print and Impossible Mourning" Marian Crawford investigates, whether printing methods can serve as allegory on the process of mourning. She sees the print matrix that emerges through the separation of print and printing plate, or printing block, as the idea of loss. During the process of separation that follows the actual printing, the peculiar difference of two versions of a picture that have the same 'initial thought', is questioned. Assuming that humans tend to be loyal to nativities, Crawford infers, that at first sight of a print, feelings such as disappointment or loss might emerge.<sup>30</sup> Crawford proceeds by consulting *The Work of Mourning* by French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) as an analogy for the above-mentioned loss. In this piece, Derrida formulates the law of friendship and mourning. This law states, that of two friends, one always has to die first. The deceased is moving into an indefinable distance, while the survivor is left behind in memories. This survivors` fidelity is expressed through mourning, while this mourning is understood as the internalisation of the other. The internalisation of the dead is, however, never finished: it cannot be completed. Indeed, usually this is not intended, as a complete interiorisation would lead to a degradation of the deceased und would lead to a narcissistic and pathological obsession with the dead. But it is impossible to change the otherness of the dead (Derrida, 2001, pp. 9-11). And thus, the survivor is faced with a choice: He can idealize the dead, or he can fall into impossible mourning (Derrida, 2001, p. 1). Crawford furthermore points to Derrida`s idea, that every death in itself constitutes the end of the world and that the rhetoric of mourning allows us, to multiply it – to immediately accept this and, simultaneously, repeat it – not just in terms of one friend, but in terms of the deaths of lots of friends (Derrida, 2001, p. 15). She concludes: ‘We need to speak of and maintain both the deceased

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<sup>30</sup> This is also the reason Crawford gives for her own application of printing processes for the representation of the experiences of losses in her own artistic oeuvre.

friend's singularity and to maintain the alterity, to sustain our fidelity and responsibility to them' (Crawford, no date, p. 1). Crawford views Derrida's elaborations as metaphor for printing processes, with their nature and practising including melancholy. The survivor needs to preserve both the singularity and the otherness of the deceased friend, in order to stay loyal and responsible towards him.

In terms of an explanation for the paradox of singularity and diversity inherent to printing processes, Crawford draws on the deliberations of the American religious philosopher Mark C. Taylor, in order to investigate surface, depth and singularity. Taylor, in turn, cites Paul Virilio:

Each surface is an interface between two environments that is ruled by a constant activity in the form of an exchange between the two substances placed in contact with one another (Taylor, 1997, p. 266).<sup>31</sup>

In between the surfaces lies, according to Taylor, 'a sustainable unity that does not suppress difference' (Taylor, 1997, p. 286), in which everything can emerge and disappear – thus there are 'profound superficialities'. Following the negation of simple contradictions, Taylor's reasoning includes: 'Death is not merely death but also harbours a faint pulse of life' (Taylor, 1997, pp. 213-214).

Marian Crawford points to the analogy of these deliberations to the process of printing, which involves two surfaces joining. She solves the paradox of the simultaneous singularity and diversity by interpreting the original thought of the artist as singular, while the printing process is characterized by possibilities for diversification. Relying on Derrida, Crawford claims, that the printing process is characterized by dialogue between the original thought and the image carrier. Print and printing block are characterized by a real cohesiveness but also by alterity. This leads to an endless mourning, as every printing process contains the potential to stay loyal to its origin, but also to balance a pluralizing diversity. Both the issue of printing processes and

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<sup>31</sup> The nexus of two materials is, according to Taylor (1997, p. 266), 'an entryway hidden in the most imperceptible entity. From here on, the appearance of surfaces and superficialities conceals a secret transparency, a thickness without thickness, a volume without volume, an imperceptible quality'.

Derrida's thought are concerned with the 'reorganization of space' in general and structures, which is essential for us in order to understand absence and differences. Thus, according to Crawford, print and printing block are in a mutually dependent relationship and in an endless exchange with each other. The main concern here is the distance to and recognition of originality. Crawford states for the parameter of serial printing, which is characterized by ubiquity: 'They remind us not of the ideal, but of the present imperfect living' (Crawford, no date, p. 7).

#### **4.3. Conversation with Marian Crawford about the *Loss of Unity* (June/July 2014)**

**Christoph M. Loos:** The analogy of printing and the process of mourning outlined in your essay "The Print and Impossible Mourning" is very special and profitable. How would you describe the moment of *loss* taking place during the printing process? How can this loss be captured in words?

**Marian Crawford:** *As each piece of paper is lifted from the matrix and we observe the paper image as it separates from the matrix (which also is the image but on wood (or metal)), we wonder at the curious difference between the two (or more) versions of the image that started as one. If it is our inclination to be faithful to origins or beginnings, then we might feel a disappointment or loss when we first see this image on paper, and the change that has been wrought to the 'first' image.*

**CML:** This answer sounds interesting, also – this is only a side note – because of your hidden analogy: 'started as one'. Coming back to your answer, this means in your opinion that in the printing process a disappointment, a feeling of loss, and mourning is always inherent. My understanding of *loss of unity* in my own printing operation is fundamentally different. As part of my concept, there is a loss of unity, because originally print and printing block have been a unity in the tree, i.e. in a trunk of a tree. The loss of unity, as a first technical woodcut, brings me to the two necessary parameters: the wooden sheets. I am printing on and the printing block I am

printing with. When the wooden cylinders could potentially be my inverse image (prototype) and the wooden leaves the reverse images (reflection), than I actually cannot experience an inverse image because I am working on a cylinder and not on a plate. The confrontation with a whole image is not possible. As a consequence, in my work the printed image is the inverse image or prototype or archetype. On this level of my work there is no feeling of loss or melancholy. Formally, the printing block keeps the inverse image, but my experience says that the printed image is my “inverse” image. Could it be, that there is too much of a focus on a black-and-white dogma within printmaking and the influence this has on your understanding of its authenticity and inauthenticity?

**MC:** *I think of it as otherness, perhaps. It is rather an acknowledgement of the difference of the matrix to the impression, and the impossibility of the end of mourning suggesting the potentially limitlessness of some forms of printing. There are no whole images in this thinking either, although I understand that your very interesting process of making is different to mine, and neither is the image ever finished. I am intrigued about this aspect of the print too, that the matrix can always be adjusted, and that the next impression will be similar to the preceding but just that little bit different. As my memory of the deceased friend must be inherently different to the reality of the friend.*

**CML:** Referring to Derrida’s allegory, do you understand the print matrix (printing block) as the surviving friend and the print as the deceased one?

**MC:** *The mourned friend, in my rough theft of some of Derrida's thinking into a metaphor for printmaking, would be in both the block and in the print, as the matrix is at once singular and many, representing iterations of that loss. Mourning is the work of the living and is endless, and should remain endless in our respect for the alterity of the friend who has died. I think this is why it is 'impossible mourning', never ending. The matrix and the print will happily both always have the potential to be simultaneously many and singular.*



**CML:** If the mourned friend is in the printing block as well as in the print, where is the living?

**MC:** *The mourned friend is living, as is the print.*

**CML:** In your essay, you also refer to 'ubiquity' in terms of serial printmaking. I was wondering, do you use the term (also) in its religious meaning?

**MC:** *I used 'ubiquity' to mean exclusively pervasive and abundant, so, not the religious meaning (omni-present, omnipotent). The print is all around us in contemporary society - newspapers and their images, billboards, books and libraries, merchandising, and etc.*

**CML:** Especially in light of the fact that it is a series of printing processes, you argue that the print can be simultaneously unique and multiple. According to Mark C. Taylor, 'each surface is an interface between two environments that is ruled by a constant activity in the form of an exchange between the two substances placed in contact with one another.' What consequences does this theory have for the understanding of the printing process?

**MC:** *In making a print we have an interesting example of two surfaces 'placed in contact with each other', as Taylor describes. This material engagement of paper and matrix is perhaps less subtle than Taylor's use of the term 'surface', however, but it is an interesting way of thinking about the print. The significant link between the two surfaces is the intention of the artist/maker. While the print and matrix can be multiple (many images pulled from one matrix), the intentions of the author may have been singular. From this action of exchange that characterizes printing, however, the author/artist might learn to wonder and enjoy the many possible variations of their initial intentions.*

**CML:** In respect of Taylor it seems that print matrix and print influence each other. How would you describe their relationship?

**MC:** *I think it is perhaps where the author/artist/viewer notices the flexibility and variety of the images that can be produced from one matrix that the influence occurs. I'm not sure that the print and the matrix have an inherent agency to affect, although the materials themselves do have a historical significance and meaning to a certain extent.*

**CML:** I find it very interesting what you wrote about Taylors understanding of surfaces, particularly because Taylor could be a reference position to overcome the polarity of print and printing block. In the process of writing a PhD thesis, I am working on a chapter about the term *in-betweenness* in which – among other things – the term *méthexis* is introduced in the sense of a mediator-medium, as a sphere, which is responsible not only to divide things but also to connect them at the same time. Is Taylor's position – also in the sense of *méthexis* – able to overcome mourning?

**MC:** *I'm not sure that Taylor would refer to mourning in that way, and this is an interesting question. I have enjoyed thinking about his conjectures for their suggestion of the invisible exchange between matrix and impression and the ink that we print with as a type of skin or exchange. The notion of 'in-betweenness' is also very interesting for me particularly in terms of printmaking methods.*

#### **4.4. Résumé**

In her essay “The Print and Impossible Mourning”, Marian Crawford offers a new perspective of printing procedures or the printing process in particular, establishing the idea of loss, which is founded in the separation of print and printing block, following the printing process. In terms of my own works the conversation with Marian Crawford brought both differences and similarities to light. A significant difference is the fundamental understanding of ‘mourning’. Crawford assumes unifying connectedness between two levels, the idea of printing itself (‘the image started as one’), which is disintegrated by the separating of the paper from the printing block. In my own works the experience of loss is temporally prior to the printing process.

The *mourning* is different from regular printing processes, due to the initial unifying connection of the polarity of print and printing block, of which the parameters before the printing process are not related.

Furthermore, Crawford's understanding of the surface theory of Mark C. Taylor is particularly enlightening, which she associates with artistic intention. With his description of 'profound superficialities', Taylor's work corresponds to the character *méthexis*, already introduced in this work, as the (bettering) mediator-medium of print and printing block. Crawford's unique approach to print offers invites further discussion.

#### **4.5. Prospect**

The fundamental theme "the loss of unity" has of course been dealt with in all religions and is in many ways also fundamental to the individual's search for self. This is also true of Christianity, and thus is also valid for a religious context that is active up to the present day such as the Alpirsbach Monastery. By placing the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* in this context, the theme "the loss of unity" becomes on the one hand immanent to the work. On the other hand, the monastic life, which has in the meantime been disrupted, is imbued with a fresh contextuality.

## 5. Ordo Inversus

'The divergence is a dialectical operation: it is about producing the similar, but as an operative negativism, meaning, *it is about producing itself dissimilar*. Thus the imprint proves its necessity, its heuristical and theoretical value: it exceed the possibilities of what we metaphorically call the "Impression on the mind".'

(Georges Didi-Huberman)<sup>32</sup>

### 5.1. Introduction

The woodcut as a medium *sui generis* has always had an intrinsic connection to the phenomenon of mirroring. Print and printing block behave on a fundamental level as a mirror image of one another, in the sense of a positive-negative congruent image, but also in the sense of an inverted world that – potentially – reverses and agitates things (*mundus inversus*). On the printing block the image is never congruent, but rather reversed like a mirror image, which has to be reversed again. What does it mean if an image is the counter-image for the duration of the working process on the printing block, and then only in the printing process does it becomes an image, or to put it more precisely an image of an image?

This chapter will take stock of how the phenomenon of mirroring is used in my work, as well as highlighting the particular idiosyncrasies of my approach. Print and printing block will be juxtaposed as symmetric-asymmetric entities. Finally it will be show by looking at examples of specific works that the phenomenon of mirroring in my work can be seen as a *presence of identical substance*.

As in the introduction to chapter 3, we will also begin by look back on a tale form ancient Greek mythology. One version of the myth of Narcissus can be found in the third book of the *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid (Lines 402-510). The beautiful young man Narcissus catches a glimpse of his reflection in the surface of the water at a spring and falls in love with this image:

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<sup>32</sup> Didi-Huberman, 1999, p. 170 (own translation).

Quenching his thirst, another thirst doth rise; / Rays'd by the forme which  
in that glasse he spyes. / The hope of nothing doth his powres invade: /  
And for a body he mistakes a shade. Himselfe, himselfe distracts: who  
pores thereon / So fixedly, as if of *Parian* stone. / Beholds his eyes, two  
starres!... (Ovid, 1970, p.138).

Narcissus does not recognize his reflection as his own, believing it to be another person. This 'unrecognized duplicity' (own translation) (Traeger, 2004, p. 142) awakens an unquenchable longing in him. When Narcissus sees through the illusion of his own reflected image, he forsakes the world and in desperation departs for the underworld.

In relation to my own work, it is not the *self-infatuation* in the Freudian sense of the term *narcissism* that is interesting, but rather the (dramatic) moment of realization that follows the unrecognized duplicity or the unrecognized identity. This is also the way that the Swiss philosopher Paul Good sees the phenomenon of mirroring, which for him has since time immemorial been accompanied by a process of realization (Good, 1987, p. 6).<sup>33</sup>

## 5.2. History of the Mirror

Before examining mirroring as a motive in my work, the history of the mirror will be dealt with briefly from a phenomenological point of view.

The English word *mirror* comes from the Latin *mirare*, meaning *to look at*, and the German word *Spiegel* is also derived from the Latin *speculum*, which is related to the verb *speculare* (to see). Going back to the earliest human history, the phenomenon of mirroring can be traced back to the reflective surface of bodies of water. The first man-made mirrors date back to 6200 BC (Kacunko, 2010, p. 45). In the Ancient Near East as well as in Ancient Egypt, polished bronze or copper plates were used as mirrors. The first smaller glass mirrors began to be manufactured in the 11<sup>th</sup> century at the latest – for example in Murano, Italy (Kacunko, 2010, p. 181).

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<sup>33</sup> My work could thus be seen as a reinterpretation of the Narcissus myth.

In the Middle Ages the prevailing view of the mirror was as magical object. The art historian and media theorist Slavko Kacunko (2010, pp. 168-169) has characterized this view of the mirror 'as a transmission medium with certain cumulative properties that allow it to potentially function as a storage medium'. For example Pope John XXII proclaimed in a papal bull from 1326 that the devil can be trapped in a mirror (Kacunko, 2010, p. 175). This corresponded to the widely held popular belief in the mirror as an emotional medium that could reflect the true nature of the soul. The German art historian Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub (1884-1963) labeled this as a 'frozen and stored 'mirror image'' (own translation) (Kacunko, 2010, p. 179).<sup>34</sup> Mirrors were also used for divination (Kacunko, 2010, p. 176). Kacunko mentions the superstition that wizards were in possession of a so-called 'magic mirror', with which they could exert an influence on their clients (Kacunko, 2010, p. 180).<sup>35</sup>

Claiming that the medium of the mirror has always be a source of fascination for humans, the Italian philosopher Umberto Eco has proposed an explanation that is both modern and timeless:

This virtual doubling of the stimuli..., this misappropriation of the image, this permanent temptation, holding oneself to be an other, all these make the experience of a mirror into an absolutely singular experience on the threshold of perception and meaning. (own translation) (Eco, 1988, p. 38)

### **5.3. What is a Reflection?**

The existence of mirrors in ancient Greece has been document as far back as 560 BC (Kacunko, 2010, p. 124) and was therefore dealt with early on in ancient philosophy. Plato for instance grouped mirrors together with shadows

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<sup>34</sup> An example for this viewpoint can be found in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The important distinction between mirror and image will be handled in section 5.4.

<sup>35</sup> As further evidence for the idea that a mirror functions as a 'storage medium' (own translation) (Kacunko, 2010, pp. 168-169), we can take the example of pilgrims who would hold mirrors up to relics during processions. They would then carry these mirrors with them – e.g. as amulets. This was based on the belief that the mirror retained the image of the relic and radiated – like the relic itself – a 'blessed force' on the bearer (Michel and Rizek-Pfister, 2003, p.23).

and *dream images*. All three are images that are brought forth by God or nature and as such are in opposition to man-made painting (Kacunko, 2010, p. 120). On the other hand Eco put forward an updated definition coming from a contemporary viewpoint:

Mirrors are regular surfaces with the ability to reflect the arriving rays of light. Such surfaces can even be curved. We understand a plane mirror to be a surface that delivers a virtual, upright, laterally reversed (or symmetrical) image of the same size as the object and free of any so-called chromatic aberrations (own translation) (Eco, 1988, p. 29).

Eco designates the mirror as a 'prosthesis', which he compares to glasses or binoculars:

A prosthesis in a narrow sense is an apparatus that replaces a missing organ (artificial limb, dentures); but in a broader sense it is also every apparatus that extends the action radius of an organ. ...As prostheses mirrors are also simultaneously *channels*. A channel is any material *medium* that allows information to flow through it (own translation) (Eco, 1988, p. 35).

While Eco examines the phenomenon of mirroring by looking at the mechanical aspects, the main focus of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) is on considerations about the spatial structures. In his essay "Other Spaces" from 1967 he presents the mirror as a 'utopia', as a 'place without place' (own translation) (Foucault, 1992, p. 39). However, the mirror is simultaneously also a 'heterotopia', 'in that it really exists..., and from the depths of this virtual space behind the glass, I return to myself and begin to turn my gaze back on myself and to find myself again, where I am' (own translation) (Foucault, 1992, p. 39). Foucault (1992, p. 39) characterizes mirrors as 'a mixed or intermediate experience of utopia and herterotopia'. Both Eco and Foucault emphasize the mirror as an intermediary medium, although Foucault goes further ascribing a heterotropic potential to mirrors.

#### 5.4. Contextual Distinction and Overlap between the Terms *Mirror* and *Image*

Slavko Kacunko takes Umberto Eco's definition of mirror – as a plane that reflects the objects in front of it – and expands this to include the general case of perceiving a mirror and an image. He points out that there are no convincing or universally agreed upon definitions of the terms *image* or *mirror*. Nevertheless, he attempts to delineate them. The first difference between a (painted) image and a mirror image has to do with the surface. While this should be kept as visible and matt as possible in the case of a painting, the surface of a mirror must be as invisible as possible. A second difference is that the mirrored surface *registers* movement, while this is not possible in a painting. This explains the perception that mirror images – in terms of both their genesis and their effect – possess something subjective and private, while simultaneously having to do with the physical process of *reflection*, which in turn brings along an 'optical instability' (own translation) (Kacunko, 2010, pp. 15-16). The German art historian and philosopher Gottfried Boehm (\*1942) goes beyond just considering the surface. He is of the opinion that mirror and image are differentiated above all in the way their function. He criticizes a conventional concept of image that still understands images to be a doubling, and he puts forward a different reading:

Images do not function like a rigid mirror that always repeats a presupposed reality. Images are not doubles... On the contrary we expect real images to not only confirm that which we already know, but also add something more... Real images therefore imply an inner process, an iconic contrast... (own translation) (Boehm, 1994, p. 332)

In my work perceptions of images of this sort and mirroring phenomena necessarily become entangled, but this does not present a contradiction as this involves mirroring that inspires to depict – quasi an *image mirror* – and not simply a mechanical mirror. While the printing block itself has the image carved into it and can produce further images in the printing process, these images are mirrored images and thus refer back to themselves.



### 5.5. Excursus on Affinity to and Distance from *Doppelgänger* & *Alter Ego*

The use of the mirroring phenomenon in my work can indeed quite reasonably be interpreted through the lens of the images of the *Doppelgänger* and *ego/alter ego*. Therefore it is necessary to clarify how these ideas relate to the mirroring phenomenon at this point. At first there seem to be many similarities, but on closer inspection the sensory perceptual differences become clear.

One of the earliest mentions of the term *Doppelgänger* can be found in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* compiled by the brothers Grimm starting in 1838. Here they define it as follows: 'DOPPELGÄNGER... someone who bears such an outward resemblance to another person that he can be mistaken for that other person...' (own translation) (Grimm, 1970, pp. 1246-1247). In other sources such as the novel *Siebenkäs* by the German writer Jean Paul, it also means: '... someone whom one imagines could appear at the same time in two different places' (own translation) (Bär, 2005, p. 15). Above all it is in the literature (e.g. E.T.A. Hoffmann), music (e.g. Franz Schubert) and visual art of the Romantic period (e.g. William Turner) that the *Doppelgänger* motive is most often used. Often it serves as a symbol for a fear of losing identity that throws the uniqueness of the human beings into question (Bär, 2005, p. 139).<sup>36</sup> To what extent this view is valid will have to be left open for the time being. The term *alter ego* comes from Latin and means literally *the other self*. The figure of speech *ego* versus *alter ego* can be traced back to Cicero, who wrote in 44 BC in *Leaelius de amicitia* (On Friendship): 'for the true friend is, so to speak, a second self' (On Friendship, 21.80), in Latin: '*verus amicus... est... tamquam alter idem*' (Cicero, 1980, p. 92).

By definition my work can be shown to have an affinity in all respects (mirror, *Doppelgänger*, *ego/alter ego*). The mirroring phenomenon in my work will be examined in detail in the next section. Since the works originate from the

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<sup>36</sup> At times the special case of naturally occurring identical twins is included in the concept as *Doppelgängers*.

same physical material in a genealogical or genetic sense, a reading as a twin or a second self seems possible and logical. The *Doppelgänger* relationship as a personification or materialization that appears in another place is very close to a particular view of the work, especially concerning the installations, as long as the printing block is treated as autonomous, free and nevertheless in correspondence with the print. This view is also endorsed by the French art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman, who has the follow to say about the mirror character of prints: 'The print divides. On the one hand it produces a double, a copy; on the other hand it produces a bifurcation, a duplicity, a symmetry in the reproduction...' <sup>37</sup> (own translation) (Didi-Huberman, 1999, p. 143).

## **5.6. Mirroring in My Own Work**

In order to properly address the prominent role that the phenomenon of mirroring plays in the development, perception and viewing of my work, we will need to first give a very precise description of the working process. This will allow us to gain an insight into the various manifestation of the mirroring phenomenon in the work. To begin with an almost puristic juxtaposition of print and printing block mirrored in one another occurs just once in the working process when the carved wooden roller takes on its role as the printing block. It is prepared with the ink or other media used for printing and is then rolled over the leaves of wood that have been spread out on the floor. Only in this moment, in the instant of rolling, is the mirroring gesture clear and unambiguously present and recognizable. It should also be mentioned at this point that one specific feature of my own method is that the clear opposition of counter-image and image, which is usual in other conventional woodcut methods, plays no or a very limited role here. In my work the confrontation between the conceived and sought after counter-image is largely avoided as the development of the image takes place during the process of cutting on a roller and thus only one particular section of the

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<sup>37</sup> '...(just like in the tables of "chance forms" in the Rorschach test, whose production process, namely the doubling of the ink blots through folding and contact, creates the highest concentration of symmetry)' (own translation) (Didi-Huberman, 1999, pp. 143-144).

image is present at a time. This means that the first experience of the image in the working process only comes once the print has been completed. Only then and in this respect can we speak of an image of an image. This observation is valid for the entire initial stage of the working process. Later on in the process the mirroring confrontation transforms successively and incisively.



Fig 27: Working situation inside the studio: Printing block and wooden leaf (1998).

After the actual printing process, the printed leaves of wood are laid aside and placed on laths. During the subsequent drying stage – especially with leaves between 0,1cm and 0,15cm thick – a figure in relief begins to form quite quickly, and its outline is sometimes very clearly delineated (Fig 27). The tension of the original state contained in the leaves of wood cut from the tree trunk develops “pars pro toto”. This transformation and asymmetrization can modify the mirror *print* (wooden leaf), causing it to become slightly displaced. The next stage in the working process usually culminates in transformation of the mirror, *the printing block*. In line with the formal and conceptual considerations, the printing block will be as a rule dismantled, cut apart and transformed in terms of its wholeness. Concerning its specularity, we have to speak of shattered mirror in such a case, in the sense of a duplicity that has been made unfamiliar and unrecognizable. The mirror

motive in my work will be summarized in the next five subsections: a) the intact or asymmetrical mirror, b) the shattered mirror, c) the intact, but not accessible mirror, d) mechanical and metaphorical mirroring in the work and e) the mirror rhetorical figure *ordo inversus* as a meta level in the work.

#### **a) Work Phase 1: The Intact or Asymmetrical Mirror**

The very first woodcut installation I completed using my method was *Time out of joint (I-II) / Zeit aus den Fugen (I-II)* (1995) (Fig 28). This work is unique in my oeuvre in that it is the only work up till now where the printing block is presented unaltered, almost as a sculpture of tools to which the respective prints related. Print and printing block therefore create an almost intact mirroring and are recognizable as such by the viewer. This makes it possible to view the work in an almost didactic manner. Only the large prints on the wall exhibit a slight asymmetry, as noted briefly above. The French philosopher Natalie Depraz has described the aspect of asymmetry in a very revealing way – especially in its relation to the phenomenon of mirroring<sup>38</sup>: ‘It [the mirror image] encompasses the experience of anti-symmetry, which makes the image that is apperceived in the mirror into something entirely different than a sterile copy’ (own translation) (Gondek and Tengelyi, 2011, p. 611). According to Depraz the ‘apperceived other’ in mirror is not just assumed, but also a sensory experience and as such ‘placed’ (Gondek and Tengelyi, 2011, p. 611). Depraz’s use of the term *apperception* is especially insightful – although this might be barely noticeable at first glance. The term *Appräsentation* (*apperception*) was coined by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and can be defined as a positing of something else as present along with strictly present object: if an object is viewed from the side, its other side, quasi another view of its corporeality can be imagined as part of a mirroring. The apperceived as something which is ‘there with’, in the sense ‘thought of with’, but which is therefore not yet ‘there itself’. The different (apperceiving and apperceived) sides join together to form an image of an object (Husserl, 1969, pp. 112-113). The printing blocks in the

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<sup>38</sup> Natalie Depraz: “Transcendance et incarnation. Le statut de l’intersubjectivité comme altérité à soi chez Husserl” (1995)

installation *Time out of joint* (I-III) (Fig 21/22) provide a sort of visualization of this concept, accented by its sculptural and spatial presence.

#### **b) Work Phase 2: The Shattered Mirror**

The installation *Time out out joint (IV) / Zeit aus den Fugen (IV)* (1995) (Fig 29) which belongs the cycle *Time out of joint* already discussed in the previous section take this concept further and presents an arrangement with a shattered mirror. In line with the themes in “Time out of joint” – a) a contemporary critical statement, b) something that becomes out of joint in its temporality – in this installation, the printing block also becomes “out of joint”, is broken apart and is left as a quasi amorphous splintered pile. Because of its fragmentary nature, there are just isolated correspondences between the images that the viewer is able to apprehend or infer. After this time, the printing block has appeared in my works in various guises as an indiscernible duplicity. To what extent this characterization also relates to the term *clouded mirror* could be the subject of its own investigation at some point in the future.



Fig 28: Christoph M. Loos: *Time out of joint* (III) / *Zeit aus den Fugen* (III) (1995), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, detail.



Fig 29: Christoph M. Loos: Time out of joint (IV) / Zeit aus den Fugen (IV) (1995), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block.

In this context a final example from contemporary art should be mentioned: in the framework of the performance *Twentytwo less two* at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale (2009), the Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto smashed 20 of the 22 mirror that had been framed and mounted on the wall with a wooden mallet (Fig 30). Pistoletto sees the mirror as a symbol for the infinite generation of light and life. The shattered mirror therefore even multiplies its reflective power (Michel and Rizek-Pfister, 2003, pp. 25-26).



Fig 30: Michelangelo Pistoletto: Twentytwo less two (2009).

### c) Work Phase 3: The Intact, but not Accessible Mirror

As my work developed further and a conceptualization of the way I understand my work began to take shape, this manifested itself in a radicalized form in the installation *Codex Dissolutus (III)* (Fig. 31/32) realized in Japan in 2006. In the other examples described up to this point, there is one or more printing blocks that are almost always visible, and these are used to print the wooden leaves. Both parameters – print and printing block – are freely accessible and visible for the viewer. In the installation *Codex Dissolutus (III)* however the print as well as the printing block are made invisible. Printmaking is thereby celebrated as quasi pure sculpture or installation. After the printing process and the subsequent drying stage, the wooden leaves were returned to their original state by being rolled up. The print is thus for all intents and purposes no longer visible. The printing block was placed in the center of the rolled up print, and then this side of the mirror – the printing block itself – is hidden. The resulting momentum of invisibility will be examined in chapter 7. It is not by accident that the installation described was realized during a residency in Japan. The implications of this can be suggested by a quote from Roland Barthes' book *Empire of Signs*:

In the West the mirror is a narcissistic object at its core: people think of a mirror as just something in which one can admire oneself. In the East however the mirror appears to be empty, yes, it is even a symbol for the emptiness of symbols. (own translation) (Barthes, 1981, p. 109).

The mirroring gesture finds itself once again buried and inaccessible and at the same time becomes a totality in itself. Both mirrors, print and printing block, come so close to one another that they become almost identical.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For the installation *Cubic Meter of Infinity in a Mirrored Cube*, the Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto lined the inside of steel cube completely with mirrors. This illusion of infinite space is however not apparent to the viewer as this is not visible from outside. About this piece, Elke Buhr (2009) wrote: 'Again and again Pistoletto has made mirrors. He has assembled six of them with the reflective side facing inward into a cube, literally a depiction of infinity that must remain invisible...' (own translation).



Fig 31: Christoph M. Loos: *Codex Dissolutus (III)* (2006), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, Installation ACAC, Japan, 550 x 420 x 80cm.



Fig 32: Christoph M. Loos: *Codex Dissolutus (III)* (2006), Detail.

#### d) **Work Phase 4: Mechanical and Metaphorical Mirroring in the Work**

The mirror phenomenon reveals itself in my work on yet another level, which can be characterized on a very general level as something mechanical or metaphorical. Bearing in mind that the mirror phenomenon is inherent to the actual process of the work, it was a conscious decision to introduce actual mirrors – e.g. *Codex Dissolutus (I)* (Fig 24) – in addition to a mirroring



treatment of woodcut installations in the respective spatial context – e.g. *The Silence of the Sirens / Das Schweigen der Sirenen* (1998) (Fig 33). In the first work the actual mirrors used possess the quality to not only refer back to the work in a transformative manner – in terms of their own nature as mirror images – but also to de facto point beyond the work. In *Codex Dissolutus (I)* the mirrors used metaphorically reflect the mirror concept that is immanently present in the work, and due to their arrangement across from one another and the infinite doubling of the whole, they lend the work yet another character in the sense of the historical concept *ordo inversus* (Fig 24).

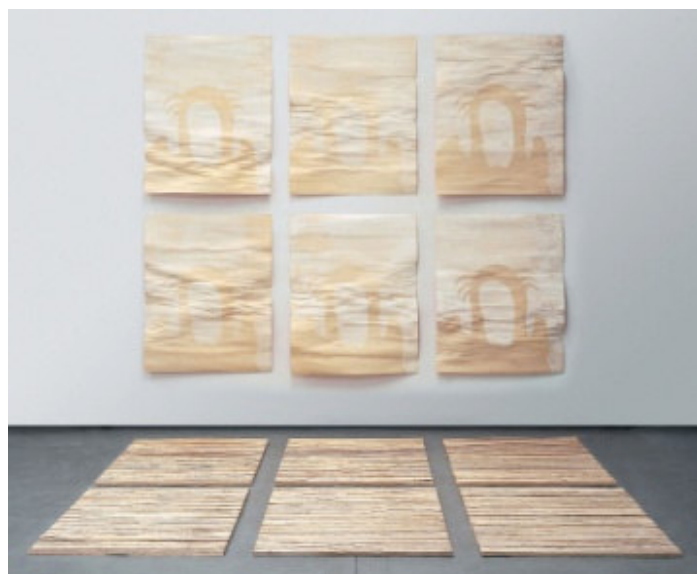


Fig 33: Christoph M. Loos: *The Silence of the Sirens / Das Schweigen der Sirenen* (1998), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, 355 x 330 x 330cm.

The second – de facto – approach takes the meeting of floor and wall to be an axis across which both real elements, print and printing block, are reflected imaginarily. In the installation *The Silence of the Sirens* the metric arrangement of the wooden leaves on the wall is projected with the same degree of metric precision into the space or onto the floor. Here the *faceless* grid is not just a formal gesture but also part of the content of the work. The motive of silence – here of the sirens – is translated into a visual form by the clouding of the mirror.

Two or more mirrors placed across from one another are a recurring figure in the history of art. For example at the documenta 4 in 1961, the Swiss artist Christian Megert covered the floor and ceiling of a room with mirrors (Fig 34). In his 1961 manifesto for a metaphysical space, he called for the creation of 'an other space': 'I want to build a new room, a room without beginning and end, in which everything lives and will be called to life...' (Megert, 1982, p. 167).

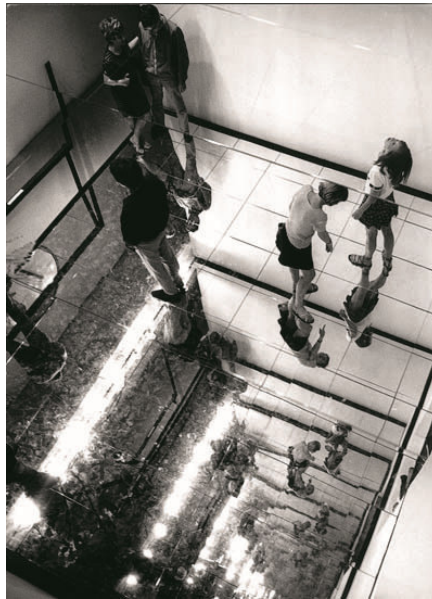


Fig 34: Christian Megert: Mirrored room (1968).

#### e) **Work Phase 5: The Mirror Rhetorical Figure *Ordo Inversus* as a Meta Level in the Work**

In the installation to be realized for this PhD Project, *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)*, the mirroring gesture discussed up to this point will be expanded to a further meta level. Mirroring – although not visible – will be present not only in the large number of rolled up prints, which will form a sort of archive, but also in a printing block that has been fashioned into a bell-shaped, which will be placed flat on the ground and will be reflected – as an empty form (Fig 35) – in earth below. This de facto and at the same time imaginary (as it is invisible) mirroring gesture can in turn be imagined to be

self-perpetuating much in the sense of an *ordo inversus*<sup>40</sup>: empty bell form(s), endlessly repeating in the earth below. This work's relation to the installation *The Vertical Kilometer into the Earth* by Walter de Maria (Fig 50) will be discussed in chapter 7.2.

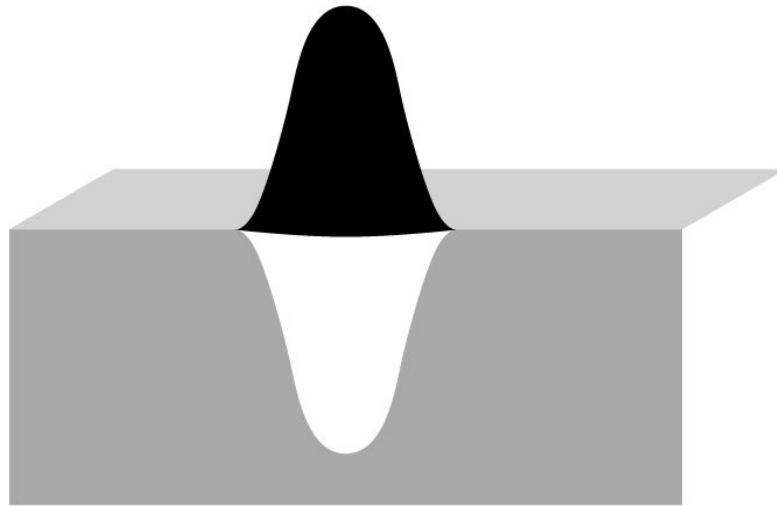


Fig 35: Working sketch for the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* / *Der Palast um 3 Uhr morgens (Ordo Inversus)* (2014).

## 5.7. Résumé & Prospects

The examination and discussion of the selected aspects of the phenomenon of mirroring in my work make clear that my work using mechanical mirrors still – quite obviously – has not exhausted the range of possibilities. On the contrary the use of mechanical mirrors is a result of my work with the phenomenon of mirroring on a printmaking level, which is in turn based on the symmetry and asymmetry of the metaphorical mirroring. Here the pure mirroring gesture is only directly present at the moment of printing. The

<sup>40</sup> The concept *ordo inversus* can be traced back to antiquity. It indicates a movement away from something that is combined with a return to the starting point. Literally the Latin word *ordo* can be translated as *the proper order or sequence* and *inversus* is the root of the English *inverted* (Kubik, 200, p. 149). *Ordo inversus* therefore means a reversed sequence. This image was used by the German Romantic poet, author and philosopher Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) among others. Based on the “Law of Reflection” as formulated by the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte – which says that every thing is recognizable in its opposite – Hardenberg assumes that the identical must be abandoned if representation is to be successful as the reflection is without feelings (Schmaus, 2000, p. 19). However by doubling the reflection, the problem can be solved: *ordo inversus* (Schmaus, 2000, p. 19).

wooden leaves, on which the print remains, record the mirroring permanently: the mirroring becomes an image. The descriptions of the individual steps in the working process with examples from my work have illustrated this desire to depict. The use of mechanical mirrors on the other hand represents a continuation of this work and a refinement of the mirroring gesture that is inherent in the work, which will coalesce in the installation planned for the cloister at the Alpirsbach Monastery.

In the spirit of the mirroring concept the observations undertaken in this chapter could be *mirrored* by the essence of chapter 3. The idea of unity in the work may function as a sort of Archimedean point – in the face so much impermanence. If this is taken as a basis and is *mirrored* with the results of the mirroring chapter, the following can be stated: in semiotics the phenomenon of mirroring is normally presented as a ‘presence without substance’ (own translation) (Michel and Rizek-Pfister, 2003). On a fundamental level, this characterization is not valid in printmaking, where the mirroring principle is present *prima vista* and relevant. As there is always a materialization in every respect, printmaking involves a presence with *heterogeneous* substance. Extending this to address my own woodcut method, it has to be said that the focus is on the distinction and the special case of a presence with *identical* substance. Concerning the idea of unity, my woodcuts can be seen, to put it in a poetically exaggerated form, as a redoubled unique. Or to put it another way – no less poetic: the idea of unity experiences itself as a mirrored simultaneity of an inverted and congruent symmetry. The mirroring idea mirrors itself *ordo inversus* as an idea of reflection. The mirroring in the work mutates into reflection over the course of the work. Returning to a concept from the Renaissance that has almost been completely forgotten: the woodcut as a redoubled unique in the sense of a presence with identical substance becomes a *speculum conscientiae*<sup>41</sup>, a *mirror of a conscious being*.

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<sup>41</sup> The Latin term *speculum conscientiae* can be translated as *mirror of consciousness*. It is a figure of thought which originated in the 15 century and found applications particularly in Christian moral theory. The Canons Regular von Groenendaal, Arnold Theoderici Geilhoven of Rotterdam ‘put together an almost complete mirror of consciousness..., an introduction to

## 6. In-Betweenness

'The picture can only emerge in this "interstice" and only there it can reveal its inherent "surplus", is real invisible, this "uncatchable excess of meaning".'

(Katharina Roters)<sup>42</sup>

### 6.1. Introduction

On many levels this work is a process of reflection and expanding awareness which can at times only be hinted at in the sense of a *speculum conscientiae*, which leads to a line of questions that, while clearly arising from investigation up to this point, seem to be even more elusive. A materialized and self-reflective polarity between print and printing block when scrutinized and contemplated – especially when this is done with the necessary sensitivity – poses the question whether something *lying in between* can be assigned an authenticity or essentiality concerning the perception of the work. In a discursive mode of inquiry, such an *intermediate field* – by definition something intangible – can only be approached indirectly by slowly and gradually narrowing in on the concept. For example one of the first questions to come up is if certain attractors or tensions between the *things* needs to be present *per se* in order for an *in-betweenness*, an oscillating *dynamic* to be experienceable or tangible.

As in all my woodcut works, the installation *Come, Nemesis, Come / Komm, Nemesis, Komm* (1997) (Fig 36/37) revolves around a print and printing block that share a common origin as a unity in a single tree trunk. Placed in a corner, leaves of wood and the printing block are hung, leaned and lain along two wall. They are separated from one another; nevertheless, they can and must be related to one another. An imaginary fourth spatial dimension (the

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moral theory. Every paragraph ended with practical advice for a detailed confession' (own translation) (Weiler, 1992: 199).

<sup>42</sup> Katharina Roters referring to Gamm and Schürmann (Roters, 2010, p. 10), cf. Gamm, G. and Schürmann, E. (2007) 'Die Unbestimmtheit der Kunst', in Gamm, G. and Schürmann, E. (eds.) *Das unendliche Kunstwerk: Von der Bestimmtheit des Unbestimmten in der ästhetischen Erfahrung*. Hamburg: EVA Europäische Verlagsanstalt, pp. 7-22 (own translation).

other three spatial dimensions are defined by the installation), which would be taken from the viewer's point of reference, defines *one's own* space.



Fig 36: Christoph M. Loos: Come, Nemesis, Come / Komm, Nemesis, Komm (1997), Woodcut on aspen wood leaves with printing block, 480 x 600 x 520cm.



Fig 37: Christoph M. Loos: Come, Nemesis, Come / Komm, Nemesis, Komm (1997), Detail of the printing block.

Despite the prints' structural homogeneity – abstract bars, quivers and benches on the one side and head- and eye-like figuration on the leaves on the other side – a correspondence, a proportionality, a relatedness and a sense of tension are palpable and visible. This does not force itself on the viewer. On the contrary, the openness of the work's arrangement implies an openness of its reception. This sort of experience can be characterized as a

type of difference in unity. The paradox inherent in this term is characteristic. In the first approach to a concept of *in-betweenness*, the closely related concepts *interval*, *hiatus* and *tertium datur* will be investigated. The importance of considering the influence that the observer exerts on the system being observed has been experimentally and theoretically well established since the advent of quantum physics,<sup>43</sup> and although this is certainly something that should be considered and will be discussed in this chapter, this line of inquiry will be omitted for the sake of simplicity.

## 6.2. Interval, Hiatus & Tertium Datur

As an introduction, we begin by examining two terms that are common in everyday language. The etymology of the modern term *interval* can be traced back to a state of being in between. The Latin root *intervallum* originally referred to the space between ramparts (Mahr, 2003, p. 43). In current usage it is often used to describe lengths (of space and time) but is also used in mathematics and music, where it refers to the distance between pitches either heard sequentially or sounding simultaneously. The origin of the word shows that reflections about *in-betweenness* were already being undertaken in antiquity. Another commonly used word is the term *hiatus* (Latin: hiatus; literally gaping from *hiare*: to gape). This term is used in various areas including linguistics and music, where it is generally used to designate a *collision* or a *transition*<sup>44</sup>. In everyday use *hiatus* is used to mean a period time (that connects or bridges a gap) – in the sense of a break. In logic the term is also appears in the maxim *hiatus in dividendo*, which indicates a gap in division or classification. The term *hiatus irrationalis* coined by the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte<sup>45</sup> can only be mentioned in passing here.

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<sup>43</sup> The Heisenberg uncertainty principle, formulated by the German physicist Werner Karl Heisenberg (1901-1976) in 1927, says that two complementary variables of a particle can not be known simultaneously. As a logical extension of this, it follows that an observer who observes the world also simultaneously alters the state of the system due to the observation. Electrons' positions, for example, would only be fixed once they are observed. This *observation of the observation* has consequences for the role of the observer in a scientific context in general.

<sup>44</sup> e.g. in the sense of a span of time

<sup>45</sup> In the course of his derivation of the absolute real, Fichte comes to the following conclusion: 'Consciousness projects being *per hiatus irrationalem*. It projects being meaning that it holds out and holds its own against being, while it tosses being out of itself and

This term already asserts itself by its linguistic beauty and the associated expansive horizon.

In scholarly discourse, the term *tertium datur* is also used in the sense of *in-betweenness*. This conceptual sphere is especially interesting in that it not only presents a substantial extension to the initial observations above, but also poses many more fundamental questions. On a fundamental level, scholarly discourse and even more in the history of mentality and the concomitant occidental predisposition depend on a binary logic founded on ancient Greek philosophy. What this means is that our thinking and everything that goes along with it have since antiquity manifested themselves in a diverse range of polarities such as positive and negative, black and white, good and evil etc. This world view is based on the Aristotelian *law of the excluded middle* (*tertium non datur*). The antonym *tertium datur* is surely more than a simple provocation; rather, it establishes a rigorous rationale to allow something that stands in between or negotiates between two contradictory poles. One of the true champions of the *tertium datur* is the physicist and cybernetics pioneer Heinz von Foerster (1911-2002). In the course of his studies of the logic of so-called second-order terms, 'in which a double negation does not, as is usual, imply a positive (not seeing not seeing leads to not seeing)' (own translation) (Foerster, 1998, p. 51), Foerster (1998, p. 50) concludes that human perception is deceptive and that the position of the observer is illusory: he or she does not see that he/she does not see. Therefore there must exist – as far as human perception is concerned – a third element, something lying in between.

### 6.3. Méthexis

The last conceptual figure to be examined here is the term *méthexis* (τὸ μετὰξύ), which can be found in Aristotle among others. In contrast to Plato,

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simultaneously throws it to the floor. Being is a projection and not simply an object of conscious awareness. But the process of coming out of itself and laying down occurs by passing through a gap (*per hiatus*). This gap is a chasm (*hiatus irrationalis*) for knowledge. Conscious awareness can not account for its projection and coming into being, nor can it propose any ultimate causes for these' (own translation) (Janke, 1970, p. 382).



Aristotle understood *méthexis* not only as an intermediary area between concrete things and phenomena, but also saw its principle meaning as a 'dissolution of elements, but also a dissolution of sensory perceptions' (own translation) (Mahr, 2003, p. 44). The Austrian philosopher Peter Mahr (\*1954) believes it to be the case 'that the referential dividing 'between' [in Aristotle, author's note] is likewise loaded with a strong degree of connecting' (own translation) (Mahr, 2003: 43). He justifies this with the idea that the dissolution that is fundamental to *méthexis* 'is transmitted by the homogeneity of the medium and the formation of aesthetic proportion' (own translation) (Mahr, 2003. p. 44). The area of *méthexis* is characterized in Aristotle as 'not-empty' (Mahr, 2003, p. 45) and as such is the thing that makes sensory experiences possible.<sup>46</sup>

#### 6.4. In-Betweenness in Visual Culture

'By nature our gaze is drawn to things; one has to learn to focus on the intervening spaces, on the empty environment' (own translation), this statement comes from the gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Metzger (2008, p. 31). To illustrate his point, we will turn to a well know example from visual culture: the Rubin Vase (1915). This visual illusion was used by the Danish psychologist and phenomenological theorist Edgar Rubin in 1921 to help explain his theory of 'figure-ground perception' (Rubin, 1921) (Fig 38). The Rubin Vase contains both the silhouettes of two faces staring at each other as well as a picture of a trophy or a vase, which occupies the space between the two faces. The viewer's perceptions *flips* back and forth between seeing the faces and seeing the vase – this phenomenon has been termed an 'ambiguous image' or 'reversing image'. Edgar Rubin (1921, p. 33) presented this visual illusion as proof 'that one is not able to make a judgement about the objective [visual] object. It is only possible to talk about the different objects that are experienced'.

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<sup>46</sup> In relation to human senses this means: 'It is air for sound, some unnamed substance for smell, a mixture for taste..., so that most [sensory experiences] are transmitted through media and not direct contact' (own translation) (Mahr, 2003, p. 45).



Fig 38: Edgar Rubin: The Rubin Vase (1921).

The Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) examined such optical illusions on a philosophical level. In his theory of perception, he designated optical illusions as *Aspektsehen* (seeing from one perspective) or *Sehen-als* (seeing-as): 'One can see an object as something that has a meaning' (own translation) (Spelten, 2008, p. 46). *Aspektsehen* has to be distinguished from purely factual or visual seeing (Spelten, 2008, p. 46) and can not be totally separated from cognition.<sup>47</sup> Returning to the example at hand, the images of the faces and the vase contained in the Rubin Vase present two different aspects, to which the viewer assigns a particular understanding. Wittgenstein assumed that it was indeed possible to perceive both aspects at the same time: one viewpoint could amount to a mixture of faces and the vase (Wittgenstein, 1984, p. 522).

Lest we think that the Rubin Vase is nothing more than an overused banal image from pop psychology, we should turn to a more contemporary example from visual art in the work of the German artist Sigmar Polke (1941-2010) in Zurich's Grossmünster (great minster) cathedral, which has only just recently been realized. In his last work before his death, he completed a remarkable

<sup>47</sup> The American psychologist Joseph Jastrow (1899, pp. 310-311) referenced this phenomenon when he wrote that optical illusions illustrate 'the principle that when the objective features are ambiguous we see one thing or another according to the impression that is in the mind's eye; what the objective factors lack in definiteness, the subjective ones supply, while familiarity, prepossession, as well as other circumstances influence the result'. Here Jastrow not only refers to the significance of subjectivity in perception but also to the active character of seeing, which play a crucial role in the reception of optical illusions.

design for twelve Romanesque windows, which included the window *The Son of Man / Der Menschensohn* (2009) (Fig 39). In this work Polke plays on this optical illusion by quoting and varying the Rubin Vase. According to the Swiss art historians Jacqueline Burkhardt and Bice Curiger (2010, p. 68), the visual illusions allow Polke to create a moment of 'instability of perception and the element of surprise' very much in the sense of the biblical passage: '...the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not' (Lk. 12:40). The Son of Man – a term that has an extremely wide range of different connotations in the Bible – is used here not only in the sense of a being created in God's image or as the Messiah, but also '[at] the same time, the window represents all of humankind, as shown in the diversity of profiles that define the composition' (Burckhardt and Curiger, 2010, p. 68). This ambiguity of the term is mirrored in the ambiguity of the presentation.

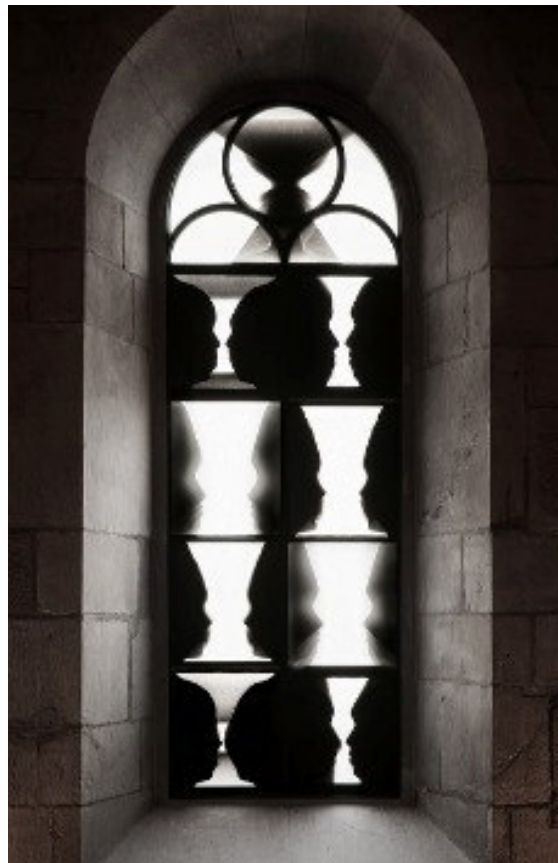


Fig 39: Sigmar Polke: *The Son of Man* (2009).

### 6.5. Further Examples of *In-Betweenness*

The installation *Come, Nemesis, Come* mentioned at the outset of the chapter deals with *in-betweenness* on a conceptual level as well as in the printmaking process itself (Fig 36/37). One particularity of this installation is the use of figuration that hints at the sort of optical illusions discussed above. The viewer's attention is drawn to the arrangement of six leaves of wood printed in black hanging on the wall. If the viewer concentrates on an individual print, it is possible to make out something that suggests a double headed figure – two bisected heads, each defined by an eye and connected to one another by a hair-like constellation. A change in perspective can arise when one of the adjacent prints is included. This suggests a head-like form with two eye-shaped objects. The perception can, though not necessarily, *jump back and forth* like an ambiguous image. The effect described and the experience of *in-betweenness* is amplified by the serial arrangement in a grid and the fact that the individual prints are in fact spatially separated from one another and thus already in this regard create or leave open a *space in between*. The overarching expansion of absence opens up the possibility to be able to make a conjecture about that which lies in between.

Another example from my work, whose title makes it immediately clear that it deals with the sphere of *in-betweenness*, is the installation *Antivenom (Kath'hauto) / Gegengift (Kath'hauto)* (1999) (Fig 40). Print and printing block complement one another or are connected together as they each represent an antivenom for the other, and this makes the implication of *coming from themselves* (Greek: *kath'hauto*) that much stronger. In this context antivenom should be understood as an antidote in a homeopathic sense, i.e. that it only becomes *effective* at the same or higher *potency*. An *intermediate*-sphere in the sense of a *méthesis* and a *tertium datur* is made possible or perhaps even asserts itself given an appropriate disposition. This work exemplifies exactly what Mahr identified above as a prerequisite for the force necessary to carry out a partition: the 'homogeneity of the medium' (own translation) (Mahr, 2003, p. 44).



Fig 40: Christoph M. Loos: Antivenom (Kath'hauto) / Gegengift (Kath'hauto) (1999), Woodcut on aspen wood leaves with printing block, 340 x 400 x 300cm.

The same is true of the installation *March of the heretics / Aufmarsch der Ketzer* (1996) (Fig 41). An *in-betweenness* takes effect when the polarities are taken into consideration. The *heretics* (German: die Ketzer) on the three prints are only recognized as such when the metaphorical and relative power or clumsiness of the base of the printing block is re-imagined as the *hooves* of the (printed) image.



Fig 41: Christoph M. Loos: March of the heretics / Aufmarsch der Ketzer (1996), Woodcut on aspen wood leaves with printing block H, installation Kunstmuseum Bonn.

Finally, we will turn to an impressive example by Marcel Duchamp: *Feuille de vigne femelle / Female Fig Leaf* from 1961 (Fig 42). Duchamp was also very conscious about how he handled a *tertium datur* with respect to an *in-betweenness* and the accompanying quality of a – totally explicit – printing (imprinting) process. According to Duchamp the print or imprint possesses a dialectic force (Didi-Huberman, 1999, p. 170). Duchamp rejects simple antitheses like *yes* and *no*. But even an *indifference* seems to have little meaning for him. In his view the imprint of an object presents a ‘dialectical operation of its *difference*, its divergence’ (own translation) (Didi-Huberman, 1999, p. 170). This view allowed Duchamp to work ‘beyond the law of non-contradiction’ (Didi-Huberman, 1999, p. 170) and to go forward based on a ‘harmony of opposing poles’ (own translation) (Didi-Huberman, 1999, p. 171). That which lies in between for Duchamp is therefore the place of the dialectic between the difference of two polarities.



Fig 42: Marcel Duchamp: Female Fig Leaf (1950 / cast 1961).

## 6.6. Résumé

In investigating the idea of a field existing between things as an effective sphere – or perhaps something closer to the terms *atmosphere*<sup>48</sup> or *aura*<sup>49</sup> – there is still a double question that remains open which sums up this chapter:

<sup>48</sup> From the Greek roots *atmós* (steam, vapor) and *sphaira* (ball, globe) indicates an envelope of gas surrounding the earth or other planet.

<sup>49</sup> From the Greek word *aura*, which can be translated as breath. In modern usage it is used to mean the distinctive atmosphere or quality that seems to surround and be generated by a person, thing or place.

is the purported or conjectured third force – *tertium datur* – something that is dependent on our total worldview and disposition or should it be understood as an appeal to this, or does a polar constellation exist which is the source of its own specific nature and potency, which determines why and how the polarities form this constellation? For the present study, this question can on the one hand remain open. Admittedly, our binary western conditioning could change, but if so then very gradually. At least when we are talking about an artistic intent, it can be assumed and claimed that certain objects or constellations of objects live from exactly this sort of (emphatic) moment of *in-betweenness*. This is something that I employ in my own works. Until now and surely also in the further development of my work, the defining features and unique quality of my own woodcut technique lies in the moment of unity or a unifying idea. This is literally a prerequisite – in the moment of the separation, in the moment of the search for an endowment of identity, in the moment of *mimesis* – to be able to experience *in-betweenness*. Finally, it should be pointed out that a clear example of the concept of *in-betweenness* in my own work can be seen in the project section and accompanying the site-specific installation.

## **6.7. Prospect**

A rigorously developed concept of *in-betweenness* can be found in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. The concept even led to the development of a new ontology. In his fragmentary text *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty develops a new definition of thinking in structures. He understands this however as ‘less and less of a subjective achievement. It is relocated in being, and the structure takes on the form of an ontogenesis’ (Waldenfels, 1993, p. 198). The German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels (\*1934) summarizes Merleau-Ponty’s claim as follows: the new ontology ‘can only be understood as an immersion into earlier lines of inquiry, namely a return to antitheses of subject and object’ (Waldenfels, 1993, pp. 198-199). This necessitates a return to an *in-betweenness*, which accompanies a ‘reshaping or even disassociation of long-established concepts’ (own translation) (Waldenfels, 1983, p. 199) like meaning or sense. To understand the concept

of *in-betweenness* as used by Merleau-Ponty it is necessary to introduce his very complex concept of the 'body'. The body serves as a 'mediator between thinking and space, spirit and nature' (Küpers, 1999, p. 5). The 'phenomenal body' is more than just the physical body as its (own) movements express its soul (Günzel, 2007, p. 32). It is the place of consummation of 'being-in-the-world' (own translation). Merleau-Ponty is of the view

that our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them; we say, because it is evident, that it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of the 'object' and to the order of the 'subject' reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 137)

Accordingly the body takes on a mediating role between the inner and outer world. *In-betweenness* is both *mediated* as well as *mediating* and as such its function is more than simply dividing, rather referring back to the underlying sense (Küpers, 1999, p. 31). In addition Merleau-Ponty introduces in "The Visible and the Invisible" the term *carnal*, 'as a kind of guarantor for the unity of the world, ego and the other...' (own translation) (Stinkes, 1993, p. 126). Merleau-Ponty emphasized the simultaneity of the visible and the invisible, which he terms 'absence in the absence':

...we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 136)

The perception always harbors that which is not perceived, the consciousness and the 'unconscious', the language and the silence, the body and the carnal etc.: The visible is actually the invisible like the invisible is actually the visible. (own translation) (Stinkes, 1993, p. 126)



## 7. Invisibilities

'I find that a woodcut is most memorable when it is imagined, and not when it is seen, but rather when it is rolled up and put in the corner. Then it loses everything that has to do with adornment or with decoration or filling a space, and it can just live on like a poem or a piece of music.'

(Georg Baselitz)<sup>50</sup>

### 7.1. Introduction

As I have tried to demonstrate in chapter 6, an authentic state lying in between as a force can be found in the tension between the two polarities of print and printing block. This level of an *in-betweenness* already remains de facto largely or totally intangible. In my work there is however another further level that is difficult to access. This can be labeled the phenomenon of invisibility. The specific treatment of this in my work will be examined in the following. The goal is to lay bare the implicit contents of these invisibilities. Moreover it will be illustrated how a radical approach to creating images – like the complete abandonment of de facto pictorial representation – can lead to a very different formal understanding of printmaking as a purely sculptural space filling impression. The way that the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* deals with the phenomena of invisibility on a (sharply) differentiated and innovative level could almost be described as cumulative.

'The most familiar form of the invisible is the concept of excess' (own translation) (Kapust, 2009, p. 267). Meaningful art ultimately resists decoding. Art possess something that transcends the work itself, which can even be classified as something invisible, and this points to incommensurable<sup>51</sup> contents. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida

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<sup>50</sup> Gercken (2009, p. 36) citing Georg Baselitz (own translation).

<sup>51</sup> The term *incommensurable* was introduced to art history in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the artist Georges Vantongerloo and others. It refers to the difficulty often associated with conceptual art in particular. Vantongerloo uses the term *incommensurable* to indicate the 'incompatibility of systems, units of measurement or paradigms' (own translation) (Wieczorek, 2009, p. 149), the 'elements of chance, uncertainty and interaction as well as doubting sensory perception and the accompanying decentralized position of the observer' (own translation) (Wieczorek, 2009, p. 149), which came along with postwar art and is still now characteristic for contemporary art. The term *incommensurable* (Latin: without a

(1930-2004) makes the following statement concern invisibilities: ‘The invisible as that not seen is not an ‘elsewhere present, latent, imaginary, unconscious, hidden or past phenomenon’ but rather a ‘phenomenon’ whose non appearance is of a different sort...’ (own translation) (Kapust, 2009, pp. 268-269). Derrida breaks down invisibilities into four layers: 1) that ‘which is not actually visible, but could be seen’...<sup>52</sup>, 2) the “skeletal construction of the not visible existentialia of the visible”...<sup>53</sup>, 3) the tactile or kinaesthetic, 4) that which can be said, the ‘lekta’, which relates to the relationship between *logos prophorikos* and *logos endiathetos*<sup>54</sup> (own translation) (Derrida, 1997, p. 56). In an artistic context, *invisible art works* were for instance discussed early on in a widely cited article “The Dematerialization of Art” (1968) by the American art theorist Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler (1968, p. 35), where they put forward the idea that pieces of conceptual art are in a certain sense always invisible as any purely formal analysis can not be applied to them. The ‘rejection of the optical’ (own translation) (Mayer, 2011, p. 42) in favor of an idea or a concept is the reason why pieces of concept art always askew visual perception to some degree.<sup>55</sup>

In my work there are three contexts where invisibilities are at play:

**Context A** – reception: the first level has to do with the reception of my work. As a rule the works can not be understood without some sort of preparation. A deep interpretation of the woodcuts tends to be rather improbable from simple observation.

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common measurement) is used in the philosophy of science to express the untranslatability of a theory into the terms of another theory.

<sup>52</sup> The ‘potentially invisible’ in Husserl (Derrida, 1997, p. 56)

<sup>53</sup> The ‘hinge’ in Merleau-Ponty (Derrida, 1997, p. 56)

<sup>54</sup> Philo of Alexandria’s terms *logos prophorikos* (the uttered word) and *logos endiathetos* (the word remaining within) are normally used in Stoic philosophy in reference to Bible passages. These concepts are quite often personified by the brothers Moses (*l. endiathetos*) and Aaron (*l. prophorikos*). This Allegory supports Philo’s view that God did not literally speak to Moses, but rather spoke ‘within him’ (Kamesar, 2004, p. 164).

<sup>55</sup> Support for this viewpoint can be found for instance in the work of the American artist Sol LeWitt (1928-2007), who described his work as a type of ‘non-visual art’ or ‘blind man’s art’ (Mayer, 2011, p. 42).

**Context B** – conceptual I: The use of transparent substances, such as pure acrylic or gum arabic, gives rise to a formal invisibility. The prints are thus (quasi) invisible or only visible in certain conditions, e.g. reflection in daylight (Fig 46).

**Context C** – conceptual II: at a certain point in the development of my work, scrolls began to appear. This arose out of conceptual considerations and decisions. The printed leaves of wood were printed and then rolled up, and the prints (images) thus remain hidden from the viewer. This sealed form of presentation minimizes the printmaking character of the woodcuts, while on the contrary emphasizing and foregrounding their sculptural nature (31/32).

## **7.2. Aspects of Reception and Conceptual Levels of Invisibility**

### **Context A:**

In the installation *Chiasma #11* (2003) (Fig 43) there is a clearly recognizable juxtaposition of a sculptural form in the space and a printed elaboration on the wall. It is possible to guess that the object placed on the floor must have had an original form of an intact cylinder. The fragmented bridges of the sculpture help to suggest a connection with the printed crosses on the wooden leaves. On the whole there are certain hints of a connection of some sort between the print and printing block. However it is safe to assume that it would be difficult to guess that the cylindrical roller, which was de facto used in the printing process, once was in a state of unity with a the leaves of wood on the wall. Thus it has to be assumed that this peculiar aspect of the reception will remain invisible. If one takes an optimistic view, it might be possible that from time to time there are especially sensitive viewers for whom this is not a barrier. More precisely we can assume that there is a tendency to fall back on guessing and intuition at work in such cases. The German philosopher Wolfram Högrefe (\*1945) speaks about *intuition* of this sort as fleeting, but also complex phenomena in the sense of an *anticipatory sensibility*:

Our primary epistemic condition is bound up in exactly the self-interpreting character of the oscillation of our mental states: emotionally we already exist in an interpreted and interpreting state simultaneously. We are in ourselves and in all of us meaningful without words. In the theory of natural perception a connection has to be maintained with this prelinguistic, existential semantics, as we already begin to recognize, when we simply *are*; although obscure and striking, at the same time immediate and a leap forward. In emotions there is already a type of cognition present, which ensures a head start for meaning in our semantic consciousness, which is built on language. Ultimately we are not able to catch up to this head start linguistically. Combined with our semantic consciousness, this edge that our immediate self-interpreting has through feeling and mood takes on an anticipatory sensibility that we know as intuition. (own translation) (Hogrebe, 1996, p. 10)<sup>56</sup>

Intuitions are familiar to every human being and provide a head start for our understanding, which initially remains prelinguistic and, in the true sense of the word, language has to catch up with it. This leads us back to how this is treated in my work. In the woodcut *Chiasma #35* (Fig 44) from 2010 this level of invisibility is thematized in the work. Once again there is a confrontation between print and printing block with the suggestion of a previous relationship between both parameters. The arrangement however leads the view down a blind alley. On first impression, it seems as if the cross-hatch pattern has been printed using the wooden grid. However on closer inspection, it becomes obvious that this is not possible – first the dimensions of the grid and the print do not match, and second the grid would have to be black in the print not white. This momentum of a *trompe l'œil* – which carries the baggage of a long tradition in the history of art – is employed consciously to rebuke the impossibility of accepting and understanding certain levels of the context.

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<sup>56</sup> Put another way 'intuitions are... epistemic states that have an anticipatory character, vague representations for something that is not otherwise epistemically accessible' (own translation) (Hogrebe, 1996, p. 21).



Fig 43: Christoph M. Loos: Chiasma #11 (2003), Woodcut on silver magnolia wooden leaves with printing block, 520 x 300 x 160cm, Installation ACAC, Japan.

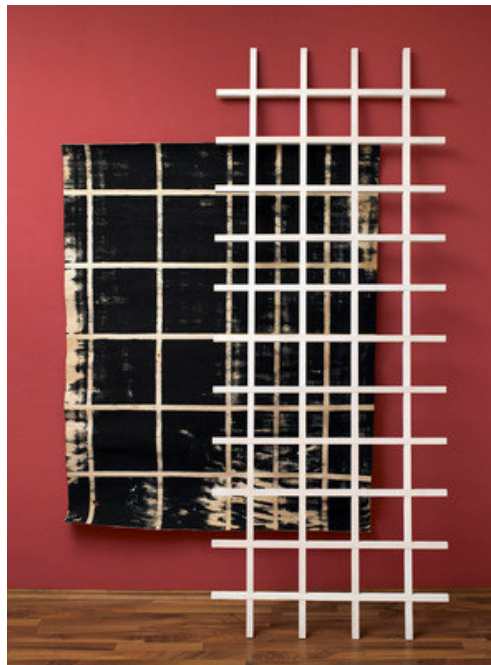


Fig 44: Christoph M. Loos: Chiasma #35 (2010), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, painted wall.

The obvious issues of reception under discussion here are can also be seen quite dramatically in a series of works by the Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto (\*1948). His series *Theaters* (from 1978) exhibits photographs that are made by leaving the camera's shutter open for the entire duration of a film projected on to a cinema screen. The surprising result is a bright rectangle (Fig 45). The film itself remains completely invisible. This context

also remains invisible for the viewer of the photos. The entire photographed film is contained in the photograph, but at the same time nothing of the film is recognizable. According to the German art historian Hans Belting (\*1935), Sugimoto's work refers to 'the living camera obscura which we are ourselves' (Belting, 2000, p. 1), and to the deceptive potential of that which is seen: 'Motion creates emptiness in the photograph' (Belting, 2000, p. 8). Belting concludes that 'The nothing and the everything are reciprocal' (Belting, 2000, p. 11).



Fig 45: Hiroshi Sugimoto: Tampa Theater, Florida (1979).

The analysis of these examples has confirmed the initial hypothesis that it is almost impossible in the context of a conventional practice of reception to open up particular channels and gain certain insights. Indeed it requires a high degree of perceptual sensitivity to be able to recognize the invisibilities in the examples discussed.

### **Context B:**

In March 2000 the site specific installation *Codex Purpureus* (Fig 46) – in my oeuvre characterized as *Site-Work (I)* – was shown at the University Museum in Marburg in their branch museum at the Marburg Castle. This work was to prove crucial for the further development of my oeuvre. The intensive study of the history of the castle led for the first time to the ideas of printing without

color or by using a transparent medium – i.e. pure acrylic, or gum arabic. Finding the right transparent substance for my work entailed a long process of experimentation during the preliminary stages. While pure, pigment-less acrylic appear to be slightly milky and yields a minimally glossy surface, gum arabic is almost transparent and only leaves an almost imperceptible trace. Due to this the paper-thin printed surfaces appear to be empty even under closer inspection. Only if viewed (whether intentionally or not) from a point in the space that falls within the angle of entry of the sunlight coming in sideways is it possible to perhaps make out a shadowy image. In art history this phenomenon is known as *anamorphosis* (Greek: anamorphus: double form, transformation), which refers to images that can only be seen from a particular angle.<sup>57</sup> This special effect is amplified by the a specific characteristic unique to aspen wood. Its surface is capable of reflecting sunlight and thus making the viewing even more difficult. A special interdependency that is worth pointing out here is that on the one hand the wooden leaves can be said to *play* with the light, which makes them visible in the first place, and on the other hand the white bark of aspens carries out photosynthesis (a task usually reserved for the leaves), so its optical properties are essential for the growth process of the tree.



Fig 46: Christoph M. Loos: *Codex Purpureus* (2000), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves, the printing block was buried in the park attach to the castle.

<sup>57</sup> In the special case of catoptric anamorphosis, the image can only be see with the help of mirrors or a system of prisms.

The concept behind the installation comes directly from the specific history of the place. According to legend, the legendary trickster Till Eulenspiegel (ca. 1300-1350) came to Marburg one day. He promptly received a commission from the Landgrave at the time to paint a family tree for the grand hall of the castle. Eulenspiegel and his assistants were pampered and let themselves be waited on hand and foot for several months – in the end they produced nothing. When the time came for the festive unveiling of the work with the counts and dignitaries from the city and the surrounding countryside, Till Eulenspiegel claimed that the paintings could not be seen by those in the audience who were born out of wedlock. The blue-blooded audience all began to effuse how how fine and beautiful the painting was. Only when landgrave's fool shouted across the room, 'What are you all staring at like a bunch of idiots? There's nothing to see.' was the prank exposed, and Till Eulenspiegel was forced to flee (Bote, 1978, pp. 82-86). The work *Codex Purpureus* is a kind of paraphrase of this legend. When facing the colorless prints straight on, the printing is almost indiscernible if they are even recognizable. Only when viewed in just the right light does the shadow of an image emerge. The printing blocks were buried in the park outside the castle. The installation presents my first explicit investigation of the boundary between the visible and the invisible. It also marks the beginning of a new group of works, which I have termed *Autochthon Woodcuts* (from ancient Greek: autós: self and khthōn: earth, soil). This is applied to works, where the essential characteristic of the work is its reduction to its material substance. Due to their extremely reduced visual information, the wooden leaves in the Marburger installation essentially speak for themselves: therefore the term *autochthon* – itself of the earth/material. The wooden leaves are thus reduced to be material. At this point it is helpful to take a look at the 19<sup>th</sup> century German art historian Conrad Fiedler (1842-1895) and his understanding of pictorial representation which is at times even valid today:

The artist is interested in the visibility of his work... to let something become visible: namely the object of the depiction, which the work places into a context from which it can be viewed (own translation) (Majetschak, 2009, pp. 166-167).



In his book *Concerning the Origin of Artistic Activity* published in 1887, Fiedler (1913, p. 349) speaks about a 'pursuit towards an artistic development of a visibility' (own translation). Based on this, every representation can be broken down into its medium, object and content. An *autochthon* approach to representation however raises the fundamental question whether it is even possible to still speak of representation when the *object of the representation* is not longer present or it has been made extremely difficult to discern. This question is of fundamental importance in a series of works that calls visibility into question and also in the special case of *Codex Purpureus*. Here it is important to point out that the lack of an object or its diffuse nature can scarcely be seen as a *problem* since it is exactly this, the invisibility or emptiness of the images that is the theme of the work. Furthermore it should be taken into consideration – as can be seen in the installation *Codex Purpureus* – that the wooden leaves on the wall are only able to make a claim to be something pictorial because of their size, their format and their arrangement relative to one another. In this case it is irrelevant whether the wooden leaves as pictures are *full* or *empty*. In the end something pictorial emerges from their pure materiality, structure, monochromatic nature, etc. Nevertheless it seems unavoidable that certain expectations will be *dashed*, and this was certainly the case in the Marburg installation. Many visitors asked for their money back as there was supposedly nothing to see.

From an art historical perspective, the artistic fascination with the invisible or *nothingness* blossomed in New York in the 1960s and 1970s (Mayer, 2011, p. 17). An example of this is the dried snowflakes on white paper by the American artist Spencer Finch (Fig 47). In the above mentioned article "The Dematerialization of Art", Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler (1968, p. 31) label the negation of visibility in American art of the 1960s as *dematerialization*, whose origin comes out of (ultra-)conceptual art.



Fig 47: Spencer Finch: Eleven Melting Snowflakes, Brooklyn, NY, 12/31/08 (2008).

Such a conceptualization of dematerialization is also the basis of a work realized for the Museum Bochum in 2002, *Anima (Unfinished Past) / Anima (Unvollendete Vergangenheit) (Site-Work (II))* (Fig 48). The work – here too as a reaction to the exhibition environment – consists of nine seemingly empty prints (wooden leaves) hung on the wall as well as an arrangement in three rows of the accompanying array of printing blocks. The museum can be seen as a place that *mirrors* the viewer in diverse ways of being in aesthetically and historically relevant manifestations; however, the installation *Anima (Unfinished Past)* turns the museum into a *withholding* mirror. Only one of the nine leaves contains a print, and this is printed extremely faintly with pure acrylic so that here too the impression of not being present or emptiness emerges. Nevertheless my own method stays true to itself with the title *Anima (Unfinished Past)* referring to the original unity. *Anima* means the striving (or *hope*) that the concept of unity as a *soul* still has meaning. *Unfinished Past* refers directly to the loss of unity and that the state of difference leaves something behind that is unfinished.



Fig 48: Christoph M. Loos: Anima (Unvollendete Vergangenheit) / Anima (Unfinished Past) (2001), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves, installation Museum Bochum, 30 x 430 x 330cm.

A powerful example that relates to the borderline character and diffuse nature of images in my work can also be seen in the work of the Chinese artist Qui Shi-hua (\*1940). His paintings also occupy on the boundary between the visible and the invisible, 'in an intermediate zone between abstract monochromatic painting and associations of landscapes' (own translation) (Riese, 2008, p. 141). The large, horizontal format works retain at most only different nuances of white oil paints. Attributes of the landscape such as mountains, water or clouds can only be guessed at (Fig 49). The art historian Ute Riese (2008, p. 141) points out that it is possible to make out more detail when viewing the painting from a distance than from close up.

The state of indeterminacy where little is specified comes close to the Oriental category of "blandness" and is seen as a state of possibly with the highest level of energy as it contains all the possibilities of development. (own translation) (Riese, 2008, p. 141)

For Westerners this concept of ‘blandness’ seems to be rather odd, but the French Sinologist François Jullien (\*1951) was able to translate this difficult concept into a Western context. In his book *On Blandness* he describes blandness in Chinese aesthetics as the ‘value of the neutral, which proceeds all possibilities and binds them together’ (own translation) (Jullien, 1999, p. 9). Blandness resists any attempts to attribute properties to it (Jullien, 1999, p. 9). According to Jullien the value of blandness is ‘that it allows us access to the undivided basis of things; its neutrality expresses the inherent wealth in the *middle*. In this state, the real is no longer “trapped” in one-sided and all too obvious manifestations; the concrete becomes discrete, and it opens itself to change’ (own translation) (Jullien, 1999, p. 11).



Fig 49: Qiu Shi-hua: *Wooded pasture* (1996).

Jullien’s understanding of blandness, which centers on the ‘access to the undivided basis of things’ it affords, corresponds exactly with the way I understand my own work, in which the reduction, the dematerialization and the diffuse nature of the pictorial representation highlights the *undivided basis* of my woodcut method. The prints (and the printing blocks) used in the installation *Codex Purpureus* and *Anima (Unvollendete Vergangenheit)* refer to themselves – not to something pictorial.

### **Context C:**

The third level of invisibility is characterized by rolling up the prints, which hides the printed *images* making them impenetrable to visual perception. To

unify this arrangement, the corresponding printing blocks were placed in the middle of the rolled up wooden leaves, thus *restoring* the original position of print and printing block – analogous to their position in the tree trunk. This treatment and the accompanying arrangement lend these particular installations a sculptural quality because of their avoidance of conventional pictorial elements. Works or installations that are based on this concept are categorized as *latent woodcuts*. The installation *Codex Dissolutus (III)* (2006) was realized in Japan, and presents a programmatic representation of the theme of invisibility in all its complexity. The object of the image is deprived of a viewing (Fig 31/32).

The terms *codex* (Latin: literally *block of wood* later denoting a block split into leaves or tablets for writing on, hence a book) and *dissolutus* (Latin: dissolved) that form the title play on the dissolved character of the original tree trunk used to create the work. The German philosopher Martin Seel (\*1954) has commented on gestures of hiding: in the moment in which the status of a work of art or the actual presence of the invisible work is imparted to the recipient, a perception is “enticed”, which it (the work) ‘immediately rebuts’ (own translation) (Seel, 2003, p. 195). This leads to the conclusion that invisible artworks ‘trigger a certain mindset, a conditioning of the senses in the viewer. The presence of the work therefore does not only become conscious through mediation, but also causes the recipient to become active, adopting a mindset for perception, which in the same moment comes to nothing’ (own translation) (Mayer, 2011, p. 98).

But what are the thoughts behind this gesture of hiding? An explanation can perhaps be found in the already mentioned phenomenological theories of Merleau-Ponty and his extremely rich understanding of the invisible: ‘The invisible is a form of negativity, which belongs to the positivity of the visible just like the silence belongs to speaking’ (own translation) (Schürmann, 2010, p. 98). ‘[...] the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible inner framework... it [the visible] appears only within it [the invisible] (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 215).

Both sides are entwined in a type of mutual embrace in a sort of figure-ground constellation. The invisibility is in part due to the vision, which diminishes or augments, focuses or overlooks; in part because of the phenomenon, which blocks, shadows or superimposes on top of the other. (own translation) (Schürmann, 2010, p. 98)<sup>58</sup>

An impressive example for an almost completely invisible work of contemporary art is the installation *The Vertical Kilometer into the Earth* (1977) (Fig 50) by Walter de Maria (1935-2003). This installation was featured at the documenta 6 and is still located on Friedrichsplatz in Kassel:

Above the surface, all that is visible is a sand stone plate flush with the ground with a 5 cm diameter brass disk in the middle. This brass disk is however just the tip of the last section of a rod that is exactly a kilometer long. Thus at the surface, only a small fraction of the work is apparent – it is an ‘almost completely invisible’. (own translation) (Schwarze, 2007, p. 85)

Only if one knows that the rod extends deep into the earth, is it possible to grasp this sculpture. This work ‘relieved itself to be one of the most exciting products of conceptual art, because everyone who has grasped the dimension of this sculpture has been left with an indelible image of the kilometer into the earth burned into their mind’ (own translation) (Schwarze, 2007, p. 85). Martin Seel (2003, pp. 202-203) also references *The Vertical Kilometer into the Earth*. If the viewer is informed about the sculpture lying in the earth below, the ‘rejection of the sculptural gesture becomes palpable, and that which is not visible in turn emerges as if a phantom’ (own translation) (Mayer, 2011, p. 103). Thus self-referential processes are triggered by the perception. The viewers not only become aware of their own present, but also their own present in a context (Seel, 2003, p. 203).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Concerning the *figure-ground constellations* see the discussion of the Rubin Vase in chapter 6.4.

<sup>59</sup> One of the first artworks, in which an image was purposely hidden from the viewers, is the painting *UNTITLED (NON-VISUAL ART)* by Mel Ramsden from the year 1967. Ramsden – today a member of the artist group *Art & Language* – turned the front of the painting towards the wall so that it turned away from the viewer (Mayer, 2011, p. 47).



Fig 50: Walter De Maria: *The Vertical Kilometer into the Earth* (1977).

Seel's insightful understanding of the invisible in art can also be applied to the installation *Codex Dissolutus (III)*, which was introduced at the beginning of the chapter. The descriptive text on the gallery wall makes the viewer aware that the work in question is a woodcut. This reference to a printmaking technique has the potential to set in motion a process of imagination. Seel for instance believes 'that perception especially... the aesthetic perception, always means the activation of several senses, that is to say it is fundamentally a sensory perception. Moreover, the sensory experiences do not have to be triggered by direct stimuli – the power of imagination is enough' (own translation) (Mayer, 2011, p. 101). Citing Seel, Stefan Mayer points to the potentially invisible artworks that stimulate imagination and thus make 'access to hidden phenomena' (own translation) (Mayer, 2011, p. 101) possible. This extremely wide-ranging and deeply ambivalent dimension of invisibility is also made explicit in the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)*, although – strictly speaking – what is present is a very *emphatic* implying. The aggregates arranged in the cloister of the Alpirsbach Monastery hold the rolled-up prints, which elude or refuse the gaze of the viewer (Fig 51). Only when one is right next to them can a faint remnant of the printed surface be glimpsed. On the other hand, the subterranean negative form of the bell form above ground in the cloister garden is

completely invisible. This negative form is inaccessible, defying visual perception. Without special knowledge – for example accessibility made possible by reading the information sheet handed out to visitors of the exhibition – it completely eludes the perceptive understanding (or realization) of the view.



Fig. 51: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (*Ordo Inversus*) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister detail (I)), 250 x 200 x 130cm.

### 7.3. Résumé

The examination of the various levels of invisibility in my work has demonstrated that the interpretation of the chosen works poses significant difficulty both in terms of reception as well as conceptual concerns. In some cases, interpretation is only possible when the viewer possesses certain knowledge about the fundamental context in addition to simply viewing the work. The invisibilities that arise out of the choice of material and/or the specific method of installing or coming out of fundamental conceptual considerations – up to and including a complete rejection of de facto present



pictorial representation – lead to three contexts of invisibility. While the level of reception could possibly be made more accessible with some sort of *sensitization of perception*, the inherently diffuse nature of first conceptual level – printing with transparent substances – makes the *recognition* of the printed images almost impossible. With invisibility based on a purposeful gesture of hiding, as seen in the third context, the printed result recedes completely into the background as a result of not being able to be seen. As a consequence, it is not only the sculptural and spatial character of the print and printing block that are emphasized – an approach that stands in opposition to the *classical* understanding of printmaking and its end result (the print as finished work of art) – but it can also potentially set off processes of imagination, which can lead to the viewer becoming actively involved with the work.

## 8. Chiasma & D'être sauvage

'What I am trying to get across to you is far more enigmatic; it is interwoven with the roots of Being itself – at the ungraspable source of sentiments.'

(Paul Cezanne to Joachim Gasquet)<sup>60</sup>

### 8.1. Introduction

The year 2003 marked an incisive break in the development of the artwork, as a decision was made to create a clear conceptual view on most of the woodcuts. Whereas works up to then had resulted from fusing time-critical or mythological image-ideas with a specific procedure, it was now the method itself, which became the image-idea, as expressed in the concept of *chiasma*. This chapter will present this process in the conceptualisation in terms of its foundation, its contents and its significance. Exemplarily, the de-facto first woodcut of the *Chiasma* series will be reviewed. Subsequently, the term *chiasma* will be explored with regard to its philosophy-historical and philosophy-critical background. This lays the ground for outlining the particular understanding of the *chiasma* theorem by Merleau-Ponty. Using further examples, the influence of this theorem on my artwork et vice versa will become clearer.

### 8.2. The Conceptualization of My Work

The decision to continue the works in a strictly conceptual fashion opened the gates for formal reflection about the printing method. The woodcut becomes its own method of reflection, additionally reflecting its own conditional relations and implications. The main stimulating potential for the conceptualisation of the own works was the intensive study of *chiasma*. The term *chiasma* is derived from the Greek *Chi* ( $\chi$ ) and means *interweaving*,

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<sup>60</sup> Merleau-Ponty cited in Paul Cezanne after Joachim Gasquet (Merleau-Ponty, 1984, p. 13). Also see: Doran, M. (ed.) (1978) *Conversation avec Cézanne*. Paris: Éditions Macula, pp. 133-198.

*junction* or *entanglement*. This first letter serves as symbol of its content: 'The Chi – two crossing paths, but still one. Because we cannot tell/know which "piece" on this side of the crossroads belongs to which "piece" on the other side' (own translation) (Herkert, 1987, p. 124). The term *chiasma* is thus defined as a dialectical figure of reciprocity between unit and difference. Merleau-Ponty has considerably contributed to establishing this concept in philosophy and aesthetics. In its essence, the *Chiasma* cycle refers back to the original unity of print and printing block. Like a distant echo, a kind of resonating *cantus firmus*, it is present latently. By means of a chiasmatic structure, i.e. the idea of interweaving and intersecting lines, the media conditions and circumstances of these woodcuts are reflected formally. The method itself becomes the image-idea.

The woodcut *Chiasma#1* (2003) (Fig 52) shows a regular and vertically printed sheet of aspen, behind which a collection of printing blocks is placed horizontally, in a similarly regulatory fashion. Print and printing block have been brought into proximity. The original unity of the two is hinted at through an imaginary crossing of the lines. Formally forcing is that the width of the bars and the width of the blocks are identical. This way, however, the impression could appear as if the bars were used for printing. That is not the case. For printing the weight of the cylindrical printing block is always required.



Fig 52: Christoph M. Loos: *Chiasma#1*(2003), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, 110 x 130cm, detail.

### 8.3. The Chiasma Theorem – Philosophy-Historical & Philosophy-Critical

The theorem or figure of thought *chiasma* can be traced back to the poetry and philosophy of the antiquity. As a 'rhetorical trope'<sup>61</sup>, it is 'a symbol of the crossing links of... corresponding... conceptual pair' (Pechriggl, 2006, p. 9). According to the Austrian philosopher Alice Pechriggl (\*1964), the *chiasma* implies that the postulated opposites between the self and the foreign are eliminated or at least relativized, which opens the perspective on the own in the other or the self in the foreign (Pechriggl, 2006, pp. 9-10).

Pechriggl notes, that in philosophy, the term *chiasma* only emerges after Plato. Plato himself did refer in his works to the figure  $\chi$ , but he never used the term *chiasma*. Paradigmatically, in *Timaios* he describes the myth of 'the emergence of the cosmos through the creator of worlds which was facilitated according to particular relations between numbers... and chiasmic geometry' (own translation) (Pechriggl, 2006, p. 11).<sup>62 63</sup>

The late works of Merleau-Ponty include a fragmented philosophy of art, which must be understood as a method that goes against the usual scientific and philosophical ideas. Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 38) himself talked in this context of *surréflexion* respectively *hyper-reflection*. He understood this as the 'self-articulation of being' or 'breathing in being' (own translation) (Huber, 2003: 125-126). Furthermore, this theorem is founded on the

deliberation, that art and philosophy alone are creations that make the "experience of being" possible, and on the consideration that the human

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<sup>61</sup> The term *rhetorical trope* delineates in rhetoric an umbrella term for a certain group of figures of speech.

<sup>62</sup> 'Next, He split all this that He had put together into two parts lengthwise; and then He laid the twain one against the other, the middle of one to the middle of the other, like a great cross; and bent either of them into a circle, and join them, each to itself and also to the other, at a point opposite to where they had first been laid together. And He compassed them about with the motion that revolves in the same spot continually, and He made the one circle outer and the other inner.' (Timaeus, 36b-c)

<sup>63</sup> At this point it should be noted that in this process of creation outlined by Plato the figure *méthexis* is central, which has already been investigated in chapter 6.3 of this work: 'The always gaping middle... in which the constructor of the world... first reinserts the cut-off parts into the whole' (own translation) (Pechriggl, 2006, p. 11). Pechriggl also notes that the analogy of this description with the figure of the spheric people of Aristophanes, as laid out by Plato in *Symposion* (Pechriggl, 2006, p. 11) and which has already been mentioned in chapter 3.1.

body is in some form the resonance body of being. (own translation)  
(Huber, 2003, p. 126)

On the other hand, a generic scientific thinking is characterised as *pensée en survol* – ‘overlooking thought’ or ‘high attitude thinking’ (Hamrick and Van der Veken, 2011, p. 50) –, which, by definition, at least when we assume Cartesian axiomatics, is in a far distance to the things and phenomena (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 93). Instead, a ‘new thinking’ is supposed to be ‘brought down’. It should be thinking, which is capable to actually get in touch with the dimension of perception, which we encounter, and to be ‘touched’ by them (own translation) (Huber, 2003, p. 10). Thus a rehabilitation of the sensuality and corporeality, which for Merleau-Ponty was to be found, prototypically, in the skills of Paul Cezanne – as an artist an ‘equal-unequal’:

[...] rather, it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration of coming-to-itself of the visible. (Merleau-Ponty, 1993, p. 141)

The corporeality, characterized as ‘a nexus of living meanings’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 151), already mentioned in earlier works, signals in his late works the transition to the chiasmic definition of the human relation to the world. Foundation of meaning always presupposes a ‘fleshly world tissue’ (on translation) (Huber, 2003, p. 13): Corporeal experience of being is always experience of truth and evidence, thus an access to pronominal substances of meaning. This specific experience of being of the individual means at the same time, that the individual takes part in the experience of the world of every other individual. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Our relation to truth is defined by the relation to others. Either we go towards the truth together, or what we are going towards is not the truth. (own translation) (cited in Waldenfels, 1971, no page)

With the establishment of the distinct psycho-physiological self-corporeality Merleau-Ponty aimed at nothing less but the overcoming of the classical Cartesian dichotomy (Huber, 2003, p. 14). He postulates a ‘being-in the world’ as body. Only the body is for human being the condition sine qua non

– being part of the tissue of the world, being first and foremost a part of the world like things and phenomena. Furthermore, human beings are able to perceive (and differentiate) the things and phenomena, which he shares the world with. This double gesture, being first and foremost part of an unity, but also being able to perceive this unity in its parts is what Merleau-Ponty terms in his late work – based on the French philosopher and Essayist Paul Valéry (1871-1945) – *chiasma* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 150-155).

#### **8.4. Influence and Interaction of the Chiasma Theorem with My Own Work**

In order to bring this theoretical discussion back to the level of my own works, the installation *Chiasma#7/#8* (2004) (Fig 53-56) – which can be understood as a quasi tryptic – will be examined.<sup>64</sup> Chiasmatic structures in divergent figuration are recognizable on both large prints. Within the installation space, the two prints hung next to each other in a corner. The doubled printing block is placed across from the prints. The printing block appears at first glance to correspond to the two prints with the black bridges of the block aligning with the grid figure. Both, being shell-like hollowed out halves of the printing block, are placed together facing the outer wall in the space. Due to the height of the printing block of some 180 cm, the analogy to the Greek letter Chi (χ) remain hidden from view unless the spatial arrangement could be viewed from above (e.g. from a set of stairs or balcony).

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<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately there is no photo available of the installation as a whole, which makes it difficult to give an accurate impression of the work. Nevertheless a closer look seems to be useful. Accordingly it will be necessary to work with single images, and the full extent of the installation will be brought together in the description.



Fig 53: Christoph M. Loos: Chiasma#7 (2004), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves, 182 x 260cm.



Fig 54: Christoph M. Loos: Chiasma#8 (2004), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves, 182 x 260cm.



Fig 55: Christoph M. Loos: Chiasma#7/#8 (2004), printing block, 182 x 40 x 40cm.



Fig 56: Christoph M. Loos: Chiasma#7/#8 (2004), printing block, 182 x 40 x 40cm (detail/topview).



It is quite easy to draw parallels between the described installation *Chiasma#7/#8* and the way the Japanese curator Goji Hamada sees systems theory as constitutive to my own woodcut method.<sup>65</sup> Instigated by Hamada – but at the same time independent from him –, the systems theoretic viewpoint has proved to be very fruitful and enlightening. This is the case because when seen from systems theoretic perspective, an immediate correspondence exists with the already mentioned self-referential elements in the art-work that arose in the course of deciding for the described conceptualization. The self-referential systems are designated as *operationally closed* in the sense of an *autopoiesis*<sup>66</sup>, i.e. the systems create themselves quasi from themselves in a continuous, non-goal-oriented process. In art and literature, self-reference has a long tradition and is – among other things – labeled as *Mise en abyme*<sup>67</sup>.



Fig 57: Christoph M. Loos: *Chiasma#10 (Einst ist alles Leib)* (2004), Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, 280 x 240 x 90cm.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. chapter 2.6.

<sup>66</sup> The term *autopoiesis* comes from the Greek *autos* (self) and *poiein* (create, build). In systems theory, this term was popularized by the German sociologist and societal theorist Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998). According to him *autopoiesis* shows 'that the operations and structures of a system are (re)produced, and it suggests tautologically that these operations and structures are (re)produced as long as they are autopoietically (re)produced' (own translation) (Schützeichel, 2003, p. 122).

<sup>67</sup> In visual culture, the French term *Mise en abyme* (abyme: infinite, bottomless) refers to an image that includes itself (so to say an image within an image). It found its way into literary criticism in the work of André Gide (1869-1951) (cf. Leopold, 2003, p. 80).

The woodcut *Chiasma#10 (Einst ist alles Leib)* (2004) (Fig 57) presents six prints offset and layered over one another. Each print has divergent cross-structures that are set in confrontation with a printing block – which (no longer) exhibits any structures – in the space. The print structures were erased after the printing process. The (self-)annihilation can also be read as being systemically based in the sense of an autocatalysis.<sup>68</sup> The printing block is thus returned to its state of potential and has the effect of a cornucopia<sup>69</sup>, similar to a Pandora's box. This withdrawing or perhaps reclaiming of the printing block opens up the field for an expanded view of the *chiasma* theorem in the sense of a *negative metaphysic* that emerges out of the experience of the art-work itself. A negative metaphysic means, in general and in this context, to start or presume that there is something present at a higher level without adopting a positive and universally agreed expression for this. The previously discussed systems theory, which likewise represents an overarching level, can be seen in this sense as one in the same as the similarly difficult to grasp categories such as *in-betweenness* and *invisibility* interrogated in the previous chapters. These signs in their tentative nature can provide a justification for introducing the term *negative metaphysic* in this context. The *chiasma* in the work as unity-difference *intersects* with the idea of unity-difference in Merleau-Ponty's work. In addition, another important topos of Merleau-Ponty plays into this line of thought, is the concept of *d'être sauvage* or the *wild being*. This understanding of a *wild being* is the basis for the *Institute for Experimental TopoGraphie* (IETG) that was already mentioned in chapter 1 and is linked in terms of contents with the concept *clara et confusa perceptio* that was also discussed in the same chapter.

In the sense of Merleau-Ponty, *d'être sauvage* is seen to be an antecedental immedicacy of being. As *wild being* – including in the sense of being a stranger to itself – is not chaotic and meaningless, but instead opens the

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<sup>68</sup> The term *autocatalysis* (Greek: self-dissolution) originally comes from chemistry. The term is used in systems theory by Niklas Luhmann and others in discussing social systems (cf. Luhmann, 1991, p. 171).

<sup>69</sup> Cornucopia (Latin: cornu copiae: horn of plenty) is a mythological symbol of happiness. It is filled with flowers and fruits and stands for fertility and abundance.

possibility of meaning. In the infinity of its differentiation it is a constituent factor for creative process at all. Engaging with *the wild* is an encounter with the essence from which existence is continually being constituted and from which it emerges. A linguistic approach only seems possible in an indirect and simultaneously mimetic form. Accordingly, the criteria for truth is less a matter of the clear, the differentiated, the simple, but, rather the opaque, the complex and the enigmatic, which can nevertheless still be the most familiar. Characteristically (only discovered much later after developing my own initial insights), but also very surprisingly – given of its complete negation in the historical and contemporary philosophical discourse – a correspondence to the ideas of *negative metaphysics* can be found in the writings of Merleau-Ponty:

*One cannot make a direct ontology.* My “indirect” method (being in the beings) is alone conformed with being — “negative philosophy” like “negative theology.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 179)

## **8.5. Résumé**

Caused by the decision with regard to the conceptualization of my own endeavor in 2003, chiasmic structures are manifesting as formal expression concerning a foundational and interlaced nexus between printing and printing block. Although the original unity is separated, this unity swings in the difference. This connection and dynamic integration of an unity-difference is formally reflected as the genuine own method in that the wood-cut becomes an idea of an image. The outlined philosophy-historical and critical aspects of the notion *chiasma* and considerations of the theorem of chiasm of Merleau-Ponty demonstrated that the same have a strong influence on my own endeavor. Moreover, one can also state that, in turn, also from the endeavor effects are rendered on the theory. My own inquiring examination with *chiasma* can claim to have pointed to a blind spot of contemporary phenomenology with regard to the oeuvre of Merleau-Ponty.

## 9. The Project: The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)

'Everything comes to pass as though my power to reach the world and my power to entrench myself in phantasms only came one with the other.'

(Maurice Merleau-Ponty)<sup>70</sup>

### 9.1. Introduction

Parallel to the theoretical investigation of the fundamental dimensions and contexts that are at play in my woodcuts and how they coalesce in the aspiration to make a truly innovative contribution a (re-)invention) within the field of printmaking, the other main goal of this project is the realization of a site-specific installation. In the present chapter the following aspects of this project will be discussed: first the development of the project will be described, the conceptual framework explained and the realization of the project documented in an extensive photo series (portfolio). This is followed by a critical reflection on the project itself but also on the ideas of this work as an *opus summum*.

In my work, the treatment of space and spaces – in the context it should be mentioned again that my artistic background was in sculpture – plays a very important role. In addition to the questions of dimension, tangibility and the approach to the individual contexts always raise questions regarding the silence, negativity and the potential scared or profane nature of spaces. That I at some point became rigorously involved with cloisters probably also has to do with the hermetic nature of my own woodcut method, which can be seen as a reflection of the hermetic nature of the special architecture found in cloisters. My work with cloisters first began by conducting research to find a suitable location. The most important factor in the search and subsequent selection was the criterion to find a setting that was as minimalistic and pure as possible. In this respect, the Alpirsbach Monastery offered the ideal conditions. The construction of the monastery founded in 1095 is modelled

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<sup>70</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 8.

after the reform architecture connected with the Cluniac Reforms, a spiritual reform movement in the Catholic Church starting in the tenth century and based around the French Benedictine Abbey of Cluny (Hochhauser, 2009, p. 121). This reform demanded austerity and discipline in the Church, sought to counter the secularization of the monastic life and is distinguished by its emphasis on piety (Hochhauser, 2009, p. 121).<sup>71</sup> This had effects on among other things the architecture and imagery of the time, which in the case of the Alpirsbach Monastery was kept very minimalistic and is characterized by a clear floor plan and a general avoidance of clerical ornamentation (Fig 58-60).



Fig 58: Alpirsbach Monastery (Black Forest, Germany).

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<sup>71</sup> '[...] The abbot Odo of Cluny [...] was convinced that the Second Coming of Jesus was near. This gave rise to "eschatological angst" [...], which could only be overcome if mankind were able to believe fervently and to live piously, obeying God and Christ, but also Mary, Peter and Paul unconditionally in order to be among the chosen and not the damned on Judgement Day.' (own translation) (Salewski, 2000, p. 410)





Fig 59: Cloister of the Alpirsbach Monastery, prior to the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m.* (*Ordo Inversus*).



Fig 60: Cloistergarden of the Alpirsbach Monastery, prior to the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m.* (*Ordo Inversus*).

The first ideas related to the concept for the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m.* (*Ordo Inversus*) already go back several years and were even put down in

writing to some extent. However the weight of a PhD project was necessary to give the decisive impulse to set this ambitious project in motion. Initially there were significant hurdles to overcome. On the one hand convincing the administration at the Monastery to go along with the planning of the project required a good deal of persuading. On the other hand there were technical issues that took a significant amount of time to solve. The first problem involved the realization of the installation, specifically how could the printing block be transformed into a bell form. The second difficulty encountered was obtaining the necessary building permissions for the proposal to mirror the bell form as an empty form dug into the ground below. After a good deal of effort both issues could be resolved in the end.

## **9.2. Concept for the Project**

The installation for the cloister of the Alpertsbach Monastery (located in the Black Forest, Germany) (Fig 58-60) has been conceived as a site specific work – in situ – in the sense that the work has been created for this particular place taking into account its specific features, history etc. The installation can be seen in the context of a wider body of work as the latest addition to a series of works and is categorized as *Site-Work (VII)*.

The early romantic concept of an *ordo inversus* – already existing in ancient philosophy – does not only appear in the title of the installation realized for this PhD by project, *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)*, but is also present in the work itself – however in a modified form. The installation in the cloister is made up of several elements (Fig 61). In each of the cloisters themselves, racks – measuring ca. 240cm high, 220cm wide and 130cm deep – are displayed in the middle of the walkways (Fig 65-70). These racks are assembled from scaffolding elements of the type commonly used in the construction industry and serve to *archive* a large number prints rolled up like scrolls. The prints display chiasmic structures, which are however not visible due to the fact that the prints are rolled up. Only at the ends of the scrolls can delicate hints of the aforementioned structures be seen (Fig 62). In the cloister garden (also called the Garden of Eden) the corresponding printing

block are placed in the center. The printing block is ca. 240cm high and 200cm wide, carved into a classic bell form (Fig 35) and sealed with tar (Fig 71-74).

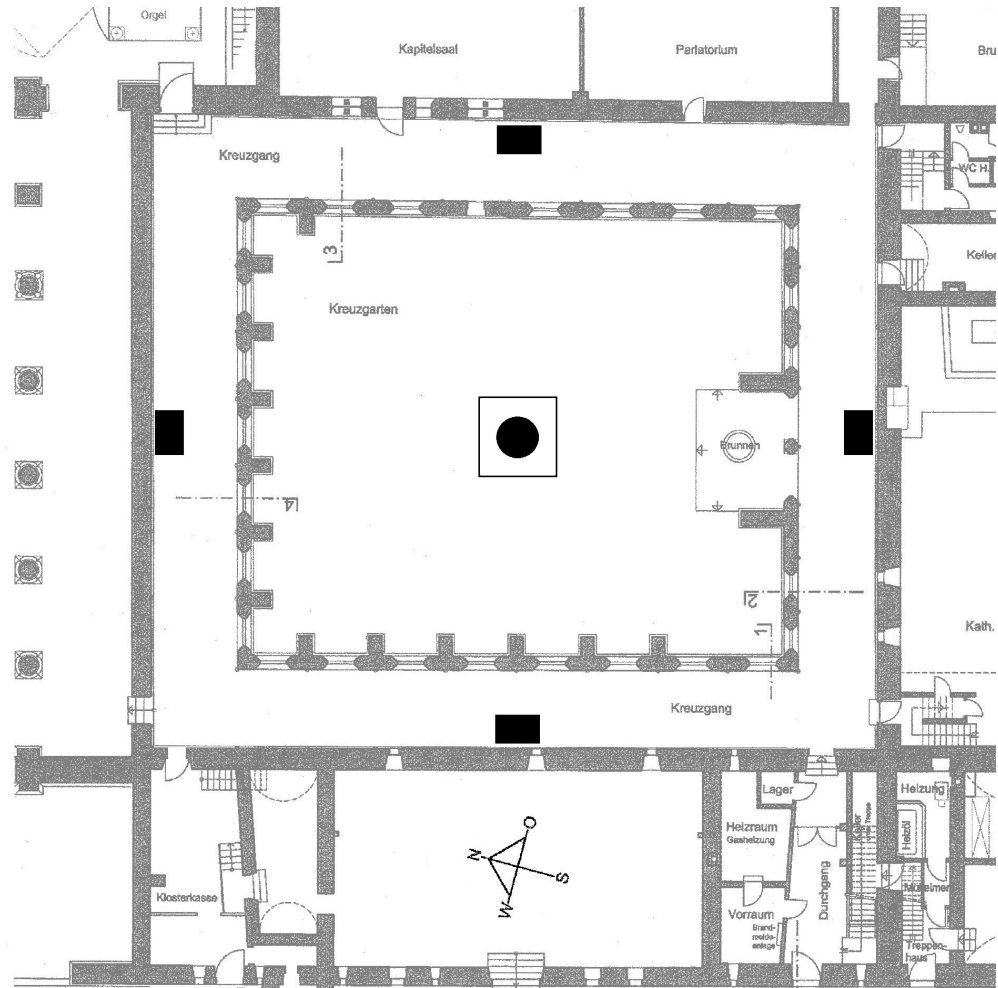


Fig 61: Groundplan of the Cloister of the Alpirsbach Monastery; marked in black the locations of the main objects of the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)*.





Fig 62: Christoph M. Loos: *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister detail (III)), 250 x 200 x 130cm.

The title *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* is a subtle nod to the surrealist work *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (Fig 64) by Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), whose sculpture provides a conceptual impulse for the Alpirsbach installation. The cloister installation focuses on various levels and themes that are fundamentally present in my work and have been examined and analyzed in this PhD. In addition to the mirroring already discussed in chapter 5, the level of invisibility dealt with in chapter 7 also forms an essential part of the work. The rolled up prints *mirror* the printing block, which results *per definitionem* from my wood method, but as printed images they remain invisible. The printing block is then fashioned into a bell form and placed flush against the ground. Underneath the printing block, there is a hollowed out cavity of the exact same shape as the bell above. The bell form is further reflected underneath as a continuation of the mirroring gesture (*ordo inversus* = a reflection that reflects itself), which is in the innermost way inherent to the woodcut methods that are being employed (Fig 63). As this mirrored form is not accessible and thus quasi imaginary, the visitors to the exhibition is alerted to this in the informational pamphlet to be handed out about the work.

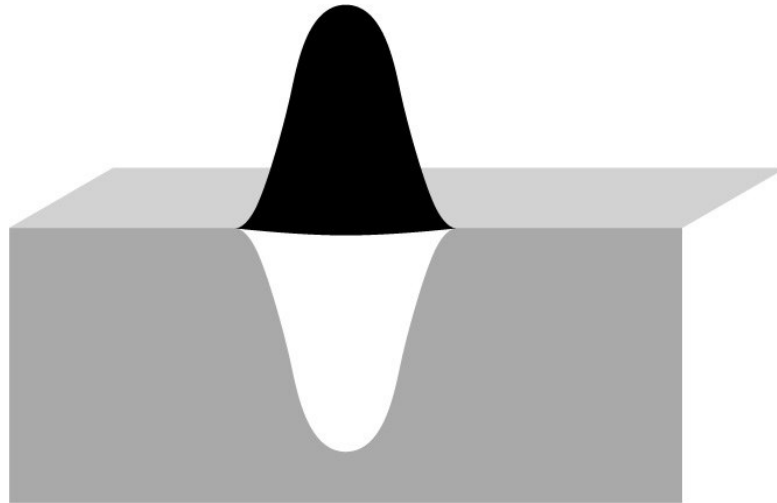


Fig 63: Working sketch for the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* / *Der Palast um 3 Uhr morgens (Ordo Inversus)* (2014).

Moreover white (goose) feathers are scattered on the grass in the cloister garden which will lend the entire installation an additional hermeticism. Last but not least, a periodically recurring audio installation that serves to emphasize the silence of the space can be heard. Here the above-mentioned mirroring gesture continues on an acoustic level. A sacred vocal sequence is processed through a series of delays and chorus effects that are layered on top of one another and laid on top of a temporal structure based on the Fibonacci series (0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, ...). Towards the end of the audio sequence, which is repeated every 12 minutes, the (mirroring) overlapping textures coalesce in a monotone sound. A comparable work can be heard in the site-specific installation in the Kunstverein Rastatt (2012):

[www.christophloos.com/rastatt2012](http://www.christophloos.com/rastatt2012)

The Title *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)*, which was as has already been mentioned borrowed from Giacometti, has however been modified and expanded. On the one hand the term *palace* seems to be an appropriate metaphor for the expansive and wonderful atmosphere of the Alpertsbach cloister, on the other hand the hour given can be seen as a symbol for the profoundly impressive silence that prevails in this place day and night. In addition to this the reference to Giacometti is also meaningful in that his work was an important encouragement and inspiration for my own decision to

study art. And so in this respect it comes full circle with this installation. Giacometti's object *The Palace at 4 a.m.* has been characterized by the curator Anne Umland (2001, p. 13), MoMa, New York, as his 'perhaps most famous surrealist work' (own translation), in which polarities like past and present, Eros and Thanatos, life and death flow into one another.



Fig 64: Alberto Giacometti: *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (1932).

### 9.3. Project Realization & Portfolio



Fig 65: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister detail (I)), 250 x 200 x 130cm.



Fig 66: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister detail (II)), 250 x 200 x 130cm.





Fig 67: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (*Ordo Inversus*) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister detail (III)), 250 x 200 x 130cm.





Fig 68: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister detail (IV)), 250 x 200 x 130cm.





Fig 69: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, feathers tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister detail (IV)), 250 x 200 x 130cm.



Fig 70: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister detail (IV)), 250 x 200 x 130cm.





Fig 71: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister garden detail (II)), 350 x 350 x 1350cm.



Fig 72: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister garden detail (III)), 350 x 350 x 1350cm.



Fig 73: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister garden detail (IV)), 350 x 350 x 1350cm.



#### 9.4. Critical Reflection towards an Understanding of an *Opus Summum*

The installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* can be seen as an *opus summum* in the context of my oeuvre, which has been built up over an 20 years course of development. At least this is my own perspective regardless whether any critics will see it this way or not. Almost all of the meta-levels inherent in the work that have been discussed up to this point – such as unity, loss of unity, difference, identity, mirroring as well as *in-betweenness* and invisibility – culminate in this one work. A comparable level of complexity and rigor is indeed already present in the work *Codex Dissolutus (III)* (Fig. 31/32) realized in Japan, but the cloister installation represents an intensification of these tendencies. As was already the case in *Codex Dissolutus (III)*, this installation also presents rolled up prints in a sort of archive. While print and printing block in the installation in Japan were arranged mimetically, this is not the case in the cloister installation. The primary reason for this is the fact that – in contrast to *Codex Dissolutus (III)* – this work is a site-specific piece. A crucial difference and extension has to do with the image of *ordo inversus* discussed in chapter 5, which undergoes a novel formal intensification with the use of the mirrored empty form in the ground. Because the empty form can not be seen from outside, the perception of this image much like the rolled up prints can be understood as an appeal to the potential powers of imagination. The bell form on the surface, which belongs to the empty form, is itself stuck in the ambivalent state between a bell quotation or prefiguration and *silence* sound object – that reflects the silence of the place, but also has the potential within itself to become a ringing signal. Moreover, the installation deals with a basic question of spatial theory and philosophy – a fact the importance of which should not be underestimated – that has until the present day remained unexplained: whether *space* itself – hence independent of our perception – exists or whether *space* is the apperception of a perceiving subject (cf. Kant, 1987, pp. 37-41). The installation with its specific features of a negative and invisible space in the ground pleads the case for a space that exists *for itself*, even though the direct perception is lacking.

Tar and feathers on the other hand refer to the historical context of the founding of the cloister, a time in which it was still usual to punish convicts with the infamous *tar and feathering* (and subsequent banishment). Moreover, the tar as a material makes reference to a natural historic closeness to the wood as a material. Coal tar oil is used for example to protect and conserve wood. Furthermore, the decision to use tar to coat the bell form can be traced back to the intention to break their affirmative quotation. On the other hand, the feathers spread out across the cloister garden have – aside from their association and polarity with the material tar – their origin in the image that the entire installation and cloister scene is covered in a white blanket of snow. As an equivalent to a white dusting of snow, the feathers stand for something *silent* that on the other hand underlines the *mute* character of the bell form (Fig 74).



Fig 74: Christoph M. Loos: The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus) (2014), Site-specific Installation, Woodcut on aspen wooden leaves with printing block, racks, tar, feathers, empty bell form, audio-loop (cloister garden detail (IV)), 350 x 350 x 1350cm (Filmstill).

The three-dimension frame constructed out of scaffolding that surrounds the bell form serves to evoke the image of a belfry, but it can also be read as a three-dimensional picture frame and a quotation of the shelving constructions installed in the cloisters. Finally, it references similar frame constructions in

Giacometti's work, for example in the bronze sculpture *Nose* (1947/49) (Fig 75).



Fig 75: Alberto Giacometti: *Nose* (Le Nez) (1947/49), bronze, 82 x 73 x 37cm.

Finally, when viewing the rolled-up prints, it should be pointed out that here – particularly in this context – it touches upon the dimension of religious aniconism. The ban on images is a fundamental feature of all major world religions – including Christianity. A religious ban on images can be explained with the idea that – starting from transcendence and not from immanence – the transcendent and therefore the divine contrast to the temporal can not be depicted. The aggregates containing the rolled-up prints bring about a sculptural imagery, refusing however to let themselves be subsumed by any iconographic narrative. At the same time the installation is in harmony with the stillness and minimalistic nature of the site.

## 9.5. Résumé

The installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* realized for this PhD project does not only address all aspects of the meta-themes discussed in the previous chapters, it also represents a radicalization. The cloister installation can moreover be understood as a continuation and intensification

of my six previous *Site-Works*, i.e. the site-specific installation since 2000. My own oeuvre of woodcuts in its complexity and sophistication can be considered a contribution to knowledge in the sense that it represents a (re-)invention of the medium. In this respect the cloister installation belongs to this, but in an expanded form with a novel understanding of an *ordo inversus*. Even more the installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* essentially lives from the entanglement of an *ordo inversus* and a *mundus inversus* in the sense of *a world turned upside down*.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The German literary scholar Romy Günthart (2003, p. 92) talks about the relation between jesters and mirrors: 'The jester, like the mirror, show a reality that challenges the familiar view. Jestors and mirrors call norms into question, focus on flaws, on weak spots and ones irregularities, as always to defining systems. Jester and mirror are model and caricature. Reflecting and revealing and ultimately leading to truth, [...]' (own translation).

## 10. Conclusion & Prospect

'My despair is like a fortress, set atop a mountain like an eagle's roost, reaching into the clouds. No one can besiege it. I fly down from this realm into reality and seize my prey. But I do not remain below for long; I bear it home to my castle. What I snatch are images; I weave them into tapestries that I hang on the walls of my room. Thus I live like a hermit through a rite of baptism, every experience is forgotten and consecrated to eternal memory. Everything that is mortal and arbitrary will be shed and forgotten. There I sit, lost in my thoughts, an old man with grey hair, explaining one image after the other in a quiet voice, almost a whisper; and next to me sits a child, listening to my words, already knowing everything that I have got to say.'

(Søren Kierkegaard, *Diapsalmata* from *Either/Or*)<sup>73</sup>

### 10.1. Introduction

From my point of view the medium of the woodcut should be understood as a medium *sui generis*. Due to its basic medial nature in which the confrontation of print and printing block, it is a de facto *reflection* (mirroring) and also an invitation to an *intellectual reflection*. With this prerequisite and predisposition, it can on the other hand be understood as a call for self-*reflective* and thus also self-referential processes. This intensification of the formal – and also in the sense of a conceptual art context – reflection of the woodcut medium on itself is – following the essay by Goji Hamada<sup>74</sup> – was first brought into the world with my own method. Because of this and its structural implications and innovations – dealt with in detail in the individual chapters and now finally brought to a conclusion – the present PhD as a whole seeks to make a significant contribution to a (re-)invention of the woodcut.

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<sup>73</sup> Kierkegaard, 1911, p. 38 (own translation).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. chapter 2.6.

## **10.2. Contribution to Knowledge**

### **1) Concept of Unity – Lost of Origin while Simultaneously Remaining in Contact with the Origin**

The woodcut method employed in my works – due to the common origin of print and printing block – can be considered to be singular. The resulting concept of unity, which permeates my entire oeuvre of graphic works, does not only represent a fundamental innovation (in the woodcut), but can also be seen as unique in contemporary art and art history to date. The difference that results from the liberation of the print and printing block from a tree trunk is thus the prerequisite for being able to even speak about or work from an assumption of an original state of unity. The *simultaneous* sameness and otherness of print and printing block that result from this justifies the special quality of the *loss of origin*, which results from the separation of print and printing block, as well as the renewed contact with the origin in the moment of the printing process – contexts and horizons that are not to be found in conventional print making.

### **2) A Very Different Way of Understanding Printmaking**

My own work – in contrast to conventional, paper-based printmaking – is distinguished by a very different way of understanding printmaking. The woodcut method is not only consequently conceived and implemented in the literal sense as a *wood-cut* compared to conventional woodcut methods. In the course of the decision toward a conceptualization of my own work in 2003, it led moreover to a transformation of my own woodcut method into a *purely* sculptural or installation work, without any sort of two-dimensional imagery – whether figurative or abstract.

### **3) Woodcut as a Medium of Systemic Reflection, in the Sense of Conceptual Art**

Based on a fundamental decision to define my own method as conceptual art starting in 2003 and inspired by the *chiasma* concept, the woodcuts have become a medium of reflection of themselves. The resulting *Chiasma* cycle at its core refers back to the original unity of print and printing block, which is



latently present as a distant echo. Through a chiasmatic structure, i.e. the idea of interlocking and crossing over, the medial conditions and circumstances of the woodcuts are reflected formally. The method itself becomes a visual concept and can in this respect also be examined from the perspective of systems theory.

#### **4) Presence with Identical Substance**

In the exploration of the different aspects and forms of mirroring in my work, an understanding of the phenomenon of mirroring in my work as a *presence with identical substance* – based on concepts from semiotics – could be established. Accompanying this is the further distinction to conventional printmaking, where a *presence with a heterogeneous substance* can be assumed, as well as the view of my own woodcut method as a *redoubled unique*: ‘the woodcut as a redoubled unique in the sense of a presence with identical substance becomes a *speculum conscientiae*, a “mirror of a conscious being”.<sup>75</sup>

#### **5) Expansion of the Concept of Identity in the Woodcut Medium**

Because of the original state of unity of print and printing block, it follows logically that the aspect of identity in the woodcut medium must be reexamined. Here my own method comes much closer to the original sense of the word identity (Latin: *idem*: *the same*) than other discourses on identity, be it in an aesthetic or social respect. The division of the individual (Latin: *individuum*: not divisible) tree trunk gives rise to a simultaneousness of a sameness (relating to the origin or the material) and an otherness (relating to the function of print of printing block) in a gesture of a self-questioning identity.

#### **6) Expansion and Intensification of the Concept of *In-Betweenness***

The investigation of *in-betweenness* in my own work has clearly shown that the dichotomy of print and printing block immanently present in the work allows *something lying in between* to be experienced. This is not only

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. chapter 5.7.

amplified but also justified by their underlying state of unity and the intimately connected homogeneity of the material. Thus it comes to both an expansion and an intensification of the concept of *in-betweenness*. In reference to the concept *méthexis* in intellectual history as well as in the work of Merleau-Ponty, *in-betweenness* takes on both dividing as well as connecting qualities.

#### **7) Obscuring and Hiding the Prints in Favor of an Anamorphic or Installation Mode of Presentation**

The exemplifications of different aspects of reception and conceptual contexts relating to *invisibilities* in my own work demand a high degree of a perceptual sensitivity. While the prints with transparent printing substances make the viewing extremely difficult if not impossible due to their anamorphic character, the idea of viewing is completely rejected in the case of the rolled up prints. As a result not only the printing process or creation process but also the installation or sculptural character of this work is given primacy – the result recedes behind the method – an aspect that is in stark contrast to the *classical* understanding of printmaking.

#### **8) Modification of the Concept of Mimesis – in Relation to a Search for Unity**

The investigation carried out in chapter 3 has shown that a specific form of *mimesis* can be identified in my own work. This take on mimesis must be deemed as at least unusual in contemporary printmaking or contemporary art. The arrangement of print and printing block in my installations – in a way that mimics their natural or original roots in the tree trunk in the sense of an *imitatio* – can be understood as an expression of a *search for the lost unity*. Moreover this idiosyncratic approach also among other things opens up new ways of thinking about the concept *similia similibus*.

#### **9) Chiasma as Negative Metaphysics: Discovery of a Blind Spot in the Reception of the Writings of Merleau-Ponty**

Although only rudimentarily outlined, this dissertation can at least claim to have served as a catalysis for a reexamination of the writings of Merleau-Ponty. Coming out of the experience of my works, a connection between the

concepts of *chiasma* or *d'être sauvage* and the sphere of a *negative metaphysic* has been suggested. Such a connection has been until now totally negated in the historical and contemporary philosophical discourse, and can thus be characterized as a sort of blind spot.

#### **10) Updating and Expanding the Concept of Ordo Inversus in the Project Part**

The installation *The Palace at 3 a.m. (Ordo Inversus)* realized in the course of this PhD by project in the cloister of the Alpirsbach Monastery (Black Forest, Germany) must not only be seen as a continuation, but it also reveals itself to be an intensification of all the aspects that have played a central role in the development of my work to this point. In this sense the designation of this work as an *opus summum* in relation to my entire oeuvre seems to be appropriate. Within the installation itself, the updating and unusual extension of the historical and mostly forgotten symbolic figure *ordo inversus* – mirroring of the bell form as an empty form hollowed out in the ground – adds a distinctive layer to the work.

#### **10.3. Prospect**

As a consequence of this thesis the following three possible perspectives or prospects with its implicated motives emerge:

- 1) The essay referenced in the second chapter by Karin Stempel “Absence as Origin, or the Patience of the Very Last Question. Christoph Loos’s Woodcuts as Approaches to a new Meta-Language” outlined in depth already very early – with regard to its declaration in 1998, it could be almost called prophetic – the dimensions which are entailed in my own wood-cut technique. Her anticipation described the recognition of *approaches to a new Meta-Language*. These appreciating words can be interpreted as a mandate to work on this meta-language even more consequently.

- 2) Already in chapter 8 the connections between the chiasm theorem and the negative metaphysics have been mentioned, which in this elaboration could only be alluded to. Consequentially, a foundational interpretation should be aspired as far as temporal and economical capacities allow.
- 3) The third perspective may appear at first glance as hubris, but may be obvious and meaningful for an attentive reading of this PhD. With the confrontation of the provided elaborations, which changed and intensified the view on the oeuvre essentially, it would be consequential to write a manifest on *absolute wood-cuts* in real time.

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